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David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 130), a film critic for the magazine, is the author of "Great Books," "Snark," and "Do the Movies Have a Future?," a collection of essays, which came out in October.

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Emily Nussbaum (On Television, p. 140) is the magazine's television critic.

Sasha Frere-Jones (Pop Music, p. 142), who writes the pop-music column for the magazine, is working on a memoir about identity and popular music.

THIS WEEK ON **NEWYORKER.COM**

The best of 2012: Our critics and writers look back at the year. / The New Yorker Out Loud: Susan Morrison talks with Dexter Filkins and David Denby about "Zero Dark Thirty." / Blogs: Daily Comment by Amy Davidson and Margaret Talbot; John Cassidy on politics; Richard Brody on movies; essays on books at Page-Turner; full-screen slide shows at Photo Booth; humor at Daily Shouts; the Borowitz Report; and more. / A Daily Cartoon drawn by David Sipres, the caption contest, and cover jigsaw puzzles. / Our complete archive, back to 1925.





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THE MAIL

FAILING GRADES

As the parent of two public-school students, I read David Denby's article on Diane Ravitch's efforts at school reform with great interest ("Public Defender," November 19th). I am agnostic on the so-called reform movement, and have no great love for teachers' unions or the tenure system, but one of Ravitch's opinions bothered me immensely: to say that value-added modelling is "junk science" because "many factors can affect students' test performance" is not quite right. Of course, students might do well or poorly on tests in any given year owing to factors that have nothing to do with their teachers, but each teacher will have twenty-five or so data points every year. If one or two students are outliers, or if all students in every grade level at a certain school do poorly one year—as, for example, one might expect in the aftermath of a natural disaster—then teachers should not be penalized. But if, year in and year out, a teacher's students consistently under- or overperform with respect to predictions, one can rightly assume that some significant proportion of student performance is the result of that teacher.

*Josh Miner
La Crosse, Wis.*

As Ravitch argues, reform strategies based on extensive reading and math tests, followed by rewards and punishments for teachers and schools based on those test scores, along with the encouragement of vast charter-school expansion, have not brought about significant improvements in student performance. Tellingly, no nation, state, or district that has gone from mediocre to world-class in the past twenty years—including Ontario, Canada; Massachusetts; Finland; Singapore; and even the Aspire charter schools—has followed this strategy. Successful schools and districts have supported the development of professional teamwork, and have completely revamped how they attract, train, and support teachers. Building the teaching profession around what is known about quality teaching, and al-

lowing teachers the time and giving them the support to continually get better at what they do, has been the secret of educational success around the world.

*Bill Honig
Chair, Instructional Quality
Commission
California Department of Education
Mill Valley, Calif.*

Denby mentions a study, without providing further context, that states, "Americans scored seventeenth in science and twenty-fifth in math among students from thirty-four advanced industrial countries." However, a closer examination of the results of American students on international tests tells us something different. In fact, the U.S. usually finishes in the middle, with results that are statistically indistinguishable from those of England, Austria, and France. For a country with a much higher child-poverty rate, this is quite an accomplishment. Basically, the U.S. is in the bulge in the middle of the curve. In 2011, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study of forty-two national school systems ranked American eighth graders ninth over all in math. The Average Scores and Rankings for the fourth-grade Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, in 2011, ranked the U.S. sixth out of forty-eight countries, ahead of France, England, Austria, New Zealand, and Norway, among others.

*Brian Ford
New Delhi, India*

Ravitch insists that American public schools are generally doing just fine, and calls the U.S. high-school graduation rate of 75.5 per cent "higher than ever." Never mind that that figure is only two points higher than it was eighteen years ago. Meanwhile, twenty countries now have better graduation rates than the U.S., at a time when the global economy values higher-order skills more than ever. The graduation rate in the U.K., Finland, and Japan is now more than ninety per cent. Ravitch insists that poverty is the big problem in the U.S.

Although this is partly true, I have visited classrooms in other countries where poor kids are outperforming suburban kids in America, and I have studied generous welfare states with minuscule poverty levels where most kids fail to learn sophisticated critical-thinking skills. I have yet to hear Ravitch explain why the most privileged teen-agers in the U.S. rank twenty-first in math skills, in comparison with the richest teen-agers around the world.

*Amanda Ripley
Emerson Fellow
New America Foundation
Washington, D.C.*

I was thrilled by Denby's thoughtful and intelligent article about my efforts to prevent the privatization of public education. However, the article had two statements of fact that readers may think my views are based on, and I believe it is important to clarify them. Denby cites a high-school graduation rate of 75.5 per cent alongside my statement that "high-school graduation rates are higher than ever," but that is the four-year graduation number that Secretary of Education Arne Duncan likes to mention. I frequently refer to federal data showing that, among the eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-old group, ninety per cent have a high-school diploma; this includes August graduates, those who take five or six years to get a diploma, and those with a G.E.D. The article also describes me as mentioning a "slight" increase in the test scores of all ethnic groups, but that is not how I view the increase. The federal test scores of American students today are at their highest point in history, and that is true for whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. This academic progress has been significant throughout the past four decades, and, in math, the progress of black and Hispanic students has been dramatic. Others may see the increase as slight, but that is not my view.

*Diane Ravitch
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE LISTEN UP

At BAM Fisher, the Dublin-based Pan Pan Theatre Company presents Samuel Beckett's radio play "All That Fall"; audience members will listen to the performance through speakers while seated in rocking chairs. Gavin Quinn directs. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE TWISTED

Dee Snider, who rose to fame as the lead singer of the heavy-metal band Twisted Sister, has found an

unlikely second career as a Broadway baby. In 2010, he starred in "Rock of Ages," and this May he released "Dee Does Broadway," a compendium of show tunes with unlikely guest vocalists, including Patti LuPone and Bebe Neuwirth. At 54 Below, he'll sing testosterone-infused showstoppers and holiday favorites. (See page 22.)

ART THE OLD NEW THING

Abstract art, from Constructivist painting to atonal music, is roughly a century old. The Museum of Modern Art celebrates the centennial in the

exhibition "Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925," with works by Marcel Duchamp, Marsden Hartley, Kazimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian, among many others. (See page 22.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC SEASON OF HOPE

Christmastime is Daniel Hope time in New York: the violinist is heard in two separate programs, playing Bach with the Salomé Chamber Orchestra at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and performing a remixed version of "The Four Seasons" at (Le) Poisson Rouge. (See page 30.)

MOVIES THE BEST OF TIMES

Sergei Eisenstein cited Charles Dickens as a model for cinematic montage, and the world of movies repaid the debt with a cornucopia of Dickens adaptations. Among those screening in MOMA's series "Dickens on Film" are George Cukor's "David Copperfield," David Lean's "Oliver Twist," and a silent version of "Our Mutual Friend," from 1921. (See page 36.)

The Rockettes, stars of the "Radio City Christmas Spectacular." Photograph by Pari Dukovic.



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK DOING THE TWIST

Long before big movie musicals consisted of closeups of piston limbs "dancing" ("Chicago") and non-singers emoting banal songs with the intensity of Plácido Domingo singing Verdi ("Les Misérables"), there was a big production



that got everything right—"Oliver!" Sir Carol Reed's 1968 film adaptation of Lionel Bart's stage musical, which first played in London in 1960 and then on Broadway forever. (It screens at MOMA on Dec. 26 and Dec. 31.) Reed's work is highly stylized yet easy and unpretentious. The sets are clearly sets, open in ways that make Onna White's choreographic triumph—all of London, including the police, the bakers, the butchers, going to work in the morning—fit perfectly within the sombre painted streets. The villain, Fagin, is played by Ron Moody (born Ronald Moodnick) in a way that parodies Jewish stereotypes by slightly exaggerating them; Moody's pickpocket number is a theatrical triumph beautifully preserved. As little Oliver, Mark Lester is fine, and the entire cast sings Bart's pleasant tunes with clarity and great beauty.

—David Denby

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ALL THAT FALL

Pan Pan Theatre Company presents Samuel Beckett's radio play from 1956, directed by Gavin Quinn. Dec. 19-23. (BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

Scarlett Johansson, Benjamin Walker, Ciarán Hinds, and Debra Monk star in a revival of the Tennessee Williams play from 1955, directed by Rob Ashford. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 800-745-3000.)

THE OTHER PLACE

Laurie Metcalf stars in a thriller by Sharr White, about a neurologist whose life is unravelling. Joe Mantello directs the Manhattan Theatre Club production. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

PICNIC

Roundabout Theatre Company presents William Inge's Pulitzer Prize-winning play from 1953, in which a seductive drifter catches the attention of a young woman in a small town. Sam Gold directs the cast includes Keel Birney, Maggie Grace, Elizabeth Marvel, Sebastian Stan, Mare Winningham, and Ellen Burstyn. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

SANDRA BERNHARD

The self-proclaimed loudmouth and classy broad returns to Joe's Pub with her band, the Rebellious Jezebels. Dec. 27-31. (425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8778.)

WATER BY THE SPOONFUL

Davis McCallum directs this Pulitzer Prize-winning drama by Quiara Alegria Hudes, about ex-marine who struggles to reconnect with his Puerto Rican family and his old life in Philadelphia. In previews. (Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

NOW PLAYING

BARRE

At the heart of this numbing "pop opera," set at a Catholic boarding school, is a love triangle (our way gay romantic hero, his closeted jock boyfriend, and the Lolita-like transfer student who steals him away) that goes horribly wrong, in every unsurprising way, during rehearsals for a production of "Romeo and Juliet." There are two nice sweaters and a pair of really cute shoes onstage, but the list of remarkable things about this wheeled-around revision of the 2004 musical, written by Jon Hartmere (book and lyrics) and Damon Infrabarto (music) and directed by Stafford Arima, ends there. If this were a show written by teen-agers, you might accuse the clumsy set design, flat singing, melodramatic book, dull lyrics, and dated score, but unfortunately that isn't the case. A lot of young talent is being exploited in this show; someone might want to call their parents. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

BUMBO THE MUSICAL

Samrat Chakrabarti and Sanjay Jhaveri write this rock-opera version of "A Christmas Carol," inspired by the experiences of immigrants in New York City. Directed by Mercedes Murphy. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 22.)

A CHANUKAH CHAROL

Jackie Hoffman reprises her semiautobiographical one-woman holiday show, co-written and directed by Michael Schiralli. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 29.)

A CIVIL WAR CHRISTMAS

This relatively tight but overlong drama, by the playwright Paula Vogel, is set in and around Washington, D.C., during Christmas Eve, 1864, just a year after the Emancipation Proclamation was

signed, when America was still at war with itself. We're introduced to Elizabeth Keckley (the distinguished Karen Kandel), the black dressmaker who was Mary Todd Lincoln's confidante; Ulysses S. Grant (Chris Henry); some black servicemen; President and Mrs. Lincoln (Bob Stillion and Alice Ripley); and another black woman named Hannah (Amber Iman), who longs for freedom for her preadolescent daughter, Jessa (Sumaya Bouhail). The director, Tina Landau, means for the actors to charm us, and they do, but at the expense of our attention: they're too adorable and interchangeable in their charm. Vogel's play is the sort of spic-and-span, full-of-hope text that actors and audience members like to be a part of because it's an easy fantasy about goodness and obdurate when it comes to pain. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 30.)

OLENARY GLEN ROSS

David Mamet's 1984 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, under the crisp direction of Daniel Sullivan, wages a real-estate office's sales contest into a tooth-and-claw battle that makes a dark spectacle of this country's addiction to winning. "I don't get on the board the thirteenth, they're going to can my ass," Shelly Levene (Al Pacino), a former high roller who has lost his sales mojo, says to the stolid office apparatchik, John Williamson (David Harbour). In this uniformly well-cast revival, Pacino stands out as one of the best messengers of Mamet's gorgeous, vicious music. He has an outstanding Ricky Roma in the film version of "Glengarry Glen Ross," a part that is vividly played here by Bobby Cannavale. What plays as a comedy of perverted prowess is actually a spiritual and moral tragedy. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/17/12.) (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

GOLDEN BOY

The hero of this 1937 play by Clifford Odets (majestically revived by Lincoln Center Theatre, under the direction of Bartlett Sher), the thin-skinned, twenty-one-year-old "cock-eyed wonder" Ben Brown (the excellent Seth Numrich) gives up the violin for the boxing ring. Odets's thrilling tale, in which Joe literally and figuratively "makes a killing" in the ring, is a duel between the contending forces of success and integrity. The stage is filled with memorable characterizations, none more exciting than Yvonne Strahovski, in her Broadway debut, as Lorna Moon. Willow and wan, Strahovski gives a performance that humanizes Numrich's Joe, makes him more than just a mug with a slug. Joe's loving father (the subtle Tony Shalhoub) offers a path to wisdom. He disagrees with his son's decision to give up the violin, but he won't intervene. In this distinguished, almost symphonic production, Sher and Lincoln Center have done a great thing; they have put Odets finally and forever in the pantheon, where he belongs. (12/17/12) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE GREAT GOD PAN

Carolyn Carter directs the world premiere of a new play by Amy Herzog, about a young man living a happy life in Brooklyn until a dark secret from his past comes back to haunt him. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

REID FARRINGTON'S A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The multimedia artist riff on the Charles Dickens classic. Everett Quinton stars. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Through Dec. 23.)

SEVEN IN ONE BLOW

Axis Theatre Company presents its annual holiday production of Randy Sharp's play, based on the Grimm Brothers fairy tale. (1 Sheridan Sq. 212-352-3101. Through Dec. 23.)

THE SONGS I LOVE SO WELL

Phil Coulter recalls his childhood in Derry, Northern Ireland, in songs and stories. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through Dec. 30.)

VOLPONE, OR THE FOX

Avarice—the bottomless, Bernie Madoff kind—is the driving force behind Ben Jonson's 1606 satire. Volpone (the waggish Stephen Spinella) worships his gold, and his callers, gunning for a place in his will, feign to worship him. A master manipulator, Volpone plays sick, collecting bribes and scheming with his "parasite," Mosca (Cam-



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eron Folmar), who has schemes of his own. Red Bull Theatre, which specializes in chic renderings of classics, has once again designed a ravishing Elizabethan-punk playground. (Clint Ramos's costumes are particularly fly.) But there's a play attached, and Jesse Berger's direction wants for pinging. He has, however, assembled a crackerjack cast, with Alvin Epstein and Towah Feldshuh among the fortune hunters. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101, Through Dec. 23.)

WHAT RHYMES WITH AMERICA
Chris Bauer ("True Blood") stars as a high-strung, down-in-the-dumps father attempting to recon-

ing a song called "Brother Trucker," or Stephen Schwartz contributing the mawkish, Whitman-inspired "All the Living Day." The show, which premiered in 1977, has been refurbished over the years, incorporating modern touches like cubicles and hedge funds and the word "douchebag" and, recently, Lin-Manuel Miranda, who helps. His two songs, about a McDonald's cashier who loves the freedom of making deliveries and about two immigrant caregivers, add wit, sensitivity, and contemporaneity and make you wish for a show that's truer to Terkel's original accomplishment and less of a decades-spanning, too-many-

Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 866-870-2717. **MAMMA MIA!** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 866-870-2717. **THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **NEWSIES:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 866-870-2717. **ONCE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **PETER AND THE STARCATCHER:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929. **THE PIANO LESSON:** Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. **ROCK OF AGES:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **YANYA**



"UR Next" (1959), by Fred Herzog, in the photographer's current exhibition at the Laurence Miller gallery.

nect with his estranged daughter (Aimee Carrero) in this delightfully bizarre trifle, a world premiere by Melissa James Gibson ("sic," "This"). What the playwright is up to plotwise is not entirely certain, but it's clear that she has a singular, nutty way with language and a fine collaborator in the director, Daniel Aukin, whose compatibly quirky vision makes for a refreshingly fun show. The quartet of actors range freely across Gibson's linguistic playground, but Da'Vine Joy Randolph, as an ambitious opera extra, steals the show, giving one of the strangest, giddiest, and best comic performances of the season. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200, Through Dec. 30.)

WORKING

The musical adaptation of Studs Terkel's landmark 1974 book of interviews with American laborers is, itself, a real piece of work. For every nurse or stonemason or ironworker who appears onstage to tell a story about a job, there's a high name behind the scenes—James Taylor, say, writ-

cooks hodgepodge. (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200, Through Dec. 30.)

Also Playing

ANNIE: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 877-250-2929. **BAD JEWS:** Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300, Through Dec. 30. **THE BOOK OF MORMON:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **CHAPLIN:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHRISTMAS STORY, THE MUSICAL:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 877-250-2929, Through Dec. 30. **DEAD ACCOUNTS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DISGRACED:** Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200, Through Dec. 23. **ELF:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GOLDEN AGE:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **THE HEIRESS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **IF THERE IS I HAVEN'T FOUND IT YET:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300, Through Dec. 23. **INGENIOUS NATURE:** SoHo Playhouse, 15

and **SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **WAR HORSE:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 29-31: The Punch Brothers, the alt-bluegrass supergroup led by the mandolinist Chris Thile.

BROOKLYN BOWL

61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg (718-963-3369)—In the past few years, it's become common for



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rock acts to perform their landmark albums from start to finish, but few bands have taken the concept as far as the Providence alt-rock act Deer Tick has. In a three-week residency that began earlier this month at this chic North Brooklyn bowling alley, the group has been performing nearly all of its discography. The band will perform its two most recent releases, "Divine Providence" and the EP "Tim," on Dec. 19, the final performance. Dec. 26: Action Bronson, a bald and bearded white mountain of an m.c., is a Queens rapper of Albanian descent and a former gourmet chef. He honed his cooking and rapping chops in New York City, and his lyrics are as stuffed as a turducken with gastronomic references and food puns.

CAPITOL THEATRE

149 Westchester Ave., Port Chester, N.Y. (877-435-9849) Dec. 20-22: When Steven Van Zandt gave the speech inducting the Rascals into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, in 1997, he said, "To sound that black, you had to be Italian." They were a great soul group, with strong covers of "Mustang Sally" and "In the Midnight Hour," but everything that the Garfield, New Jersey, act tried—from their hard-rock debut single, "I Ain't Gonna Eat Out My Heart Anymore," right through to the psychedelically sophisticated "It's Wonderful"—was top-notch. Now Little Steven has orchestrated a long-overdue reunion of the original lineup, Dec. 27-29: My Morning Jacket, the versatile band led by the modern hippie Jim James, has pledged to repeat zero songs during this stand. Is this a bravura musical display or a coldhearted ploy to get you up to Port Chester three nights in a row? Dec. 30: The Steve Miller Band formed in the sixties in San Francisco as a blues group, and it went on to become an FM-radio staple with solid pop-rock hits like "The Joker," "Jet Airliner," and "Abracadabra."

CITY WINERY

158 Varick St. (212-608-0555)—Dec. 20: Ollabelle, leaders of the rootsy part of the folk scene, return with a Christmas-themed show. Dec. 21-23: Los Lobos, an American treasure for the past three decades, present an acoustic program that they're calling "Disconnected." Dec. 25: The very funny, very talented, and very tall singer Sean Altman hijacks the holiday with "Jewmongsus," which includes a new tune, "Jesus Christ's Bar Mitzvah," alongside old favorites like "The Least Jewy Jew in Jewville" and "Phantom Foreskin." Dec. 27-31: Five nights of masterly Beatles interpretations from the Fab Four. At the early show on New Year's Eve, the band will perform "Rubber Soul" in its entirety, along with other hits. Then, to ring in the new year, the group will add strings and horns for a program of orchestral Beatles songs.

DAVID RUBENSTEIN ATRIUM

Broadway at 63rd St. (212-546-2656)—Dec. 20: Forming a bridge between the new-music and indie-rock communities, Jherre Bischoff, a composer and performer from Seattle, recently released "Composed," an album of orchestral pop that enlisted the contributions of David Byrne, Caetano Veloso, and Deerhoof's Greg Saunier, among others. Saunier will join Bischoff for two free shows here, which will include new material commissioned by Lincoln Center. Dec. 27: The San Francisco singer-songwriter David Berkeley follows in the sweet-voiced, melancholic tradition of James Taylor.

GLASSLANDS GALLERY

289 Kent Ave., between S. 1st and S. 2nd Sts., Brooklyn (No phone)—Dec. 20: The Brooklyn indie-rock band Dragons of Zynth, led by twins Aku and Akweto Orsica-Tetch, the talented boy wonders, also an actor and an artist, respectively, studied with the legendary jazz composer Yusuf Lateef, who introduced them to his "autophysiophysics" theories of music. Between Lateef's approach and trips to Ghana and South America, the group evolved a unique sound: inventive use of effects-drenched guitars and synthesizers over strange, plodding polyrhythms and rippling layers of R. & B. vocals. Their only full-length album, "Coronation Thieves," came out in

2007; though they've been off the radar recently, they're rumored to have a new album coming out next year. Also appearing is the Brooklyn duo the Mast, who create a moody scene using samples, hip-hop beats, and electronics—a fitting backdrop for the smooth, clear flow and delivery of their singer, Hualé Gafon.

GOODBYE BLUE MONDAY

1087 Broadway, Brooklyn (718-453-6343)—Dec. 19: The troubadour Matt Frye, who is from North Carolina and who now lives in Brooklyn, can be found playing cafés in far corners of the borough, which has become as great an influence on his music as his home state has been. The collision between Southern ways and big-city life produces

JAZZ NOTES SETTING THE STAGE

The bassist and composer Charles Mingus made jazz a modern art by revealing its connections with other art forms (theatre, notably) and by delving into the genre's own history. Many of his works quoted freely from swing and bop classics; his sense of collective improvisation recalled New Orleans traditions; and his floating group concept, the Jazz Workshop, foregrounded the process of music-making along with the personalities of the musicians—above all, his own, which was exuberant, explosive, gruffly humorous, and politically engaged. Few of his studio recordings reflect his ideal of open-ended performances as works-in-progress, but a wonderful 1970 seven-disc set, "Charles Mingus—The Jazz Workshop Concerts 1964-65" (Mosaic), preserves some of his group's mighty, free-flowing pieces and also includes rare, extended solos by Mingus and other musicians.

The sextet featured on the first four disks, two recorded at New York's Town Hall and two in Amsterdam in April, 1964, highlights the short-lived, furiously original avant-garde woodwind player Eric Dolphy, who had been in Mingus's band on and off since 1960. Dolphy was a passionate musical abstractionist, stretching harmonies to near-tonality with ecstatic leaps and dives and frenetically rapid runs; his fervent tone wrenched melodies into cries. Some of the band's pieces run to

PIER 36

299 South St. (212-255-4233)—Dec. 31: The superstar Dutch dj, Armin van Buuren puts revelers in a trance.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE

158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Dec. 29: In 1981, Anton Fier, the former drummer for the Feelies and the Lounge Lizards, formed the Golden Palominos, a downtown supergroup of sorts that existed mainly in the studio. The group—essentially Fier assisted by a protean cast of musicians that has included John Zorn, Richard Thompson, and Johnny Rotten in its history—is marked by a collaborative spirit and a wide range of interests, including industrial music



more than half an hour; Mingus organizes them less by chord or theme than by succession of moods, as if they were events structuring actors' improvisations. Dolphy gets the bulk of the solo time. Though he wrestles at times with the episodic context, his musical character dominates, and his solos on such pieces as "Meditations on Integration" and "So Long Eric" (titled for his intention to leave the band and stay in Europe after the tour) are among his most radical.

Dolphy did leave the band, and he died in Berlin (of complications from diabetes) that June. The Ellington medley with which the new group (featuring the alto saxophonist Charles McPherson and the trumpeter Lonnie Hillier) performed at the Monterey Jazz Festival that September comes off as a threnody for him. The Jazz Workshop reassembled as a quintet and, caught live at a Minneapolis theatre in May, 1965, fit even more closely with Mingus's group concept. Neither the bop-styled McPherson nor the agile, grainy-toned Hillier soloed with Dolphy's originality, but they—as well as the ebullient, eclectic pianist Jaki Byard—were game for Mingus's leadership, and they shaped their solos to the musical masks that Workshop performance fostered.

—Richard Brody

gritty, quirky songs, sung with a breezy lit. Johnny Dydo, the former drummer and co-vocalist for the local folk-rock band the WoWz, now takes the stage as the Johns. Whether singing solo or with accompaniment, Dydo delivers thought-provoking rock songs with a poet's attention to lyrical detail and an unpunctuated, sometimes erratic voice.

GRAMERCY THEATRE

127 E. 23rd St. (800-745-3000)—Dec. 28-29: The Rebirth Brass Band, a New Orleans treasure, is the cure for the wintertime—or anytime—blues. Dec. 31: A New Year's Eve celebration with three electronic producers: RJD2, Chrome Sparks, and the art director/drum-and-bass dj. Seth Haley's synth-heavy solo project Com Truise.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 31: In the history of Blonde Redhead's nearly twenty-year career, its music has morphed from having a noisy, carefully curated sound that drew on Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine to having a more serene, electronica-influenced style that's showcased on its last studio effort, "Penny Sparkle."

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (800-745-3000)—Dec. 28-31: The jam band nonpareil Phish.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG

66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Dec. 29-31: The indie-rock pioneers They Might Be Giants.

and country music. For this show, they'll be performing a set with the guitarist and songwriter Robert Kidney, who founded his influential blues-tinged experimental-rock group the Numbers Band in Kent, Ohio, in 1969, followed by a folk-rock-tinged set featuring Lon Carson and Li-Anne Smith, two of the band's other longtime cohorts. The sweet-voiced indie-pop quartet Ida opens the show.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (866-858-0007)—Dec. 31: The rapper Nas demonstrates that life is good with a New Year's Eve show at this grand palace.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—Dec. 21: Dan Bern, a prolific and sharp-witted tunesmith with a definite Dylanesque edge, has released a dozen albums since 1997. Dec. 28: Dana Fuchs, who played Sadie in Julie Taymor's "Across the Universe" and the title role in the Off Broadway show "Love, Janis," performs her own, bluesy songs.

TERMINAL 5

610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Dec. 31: Amanda Palmer, the fan-fueled madwoman of alternative rock, and her band the Grand Theft Orchestra offer their take on Prince's album "Purple Rain."



Statistically speaking, they're all the same person.



(But we're not about statistics.)



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"Lincoln" tells an honest tale of Abe. For most of the movie, we join the sixteenth President (Daniel Day-Lewis) in early 1865, as he seeks to wrestle the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution through

THE CURRENT
CINEMA

"Lincoln" tells an honest tale of Abe. For most of the movie, we join the sixteenth President (Daniel Day-Lewis) in early 1865, as he seeks to wrestle the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution through the House of Representatives. The Senate passed the amendment, outlawing slavery and involuntary servitude, in April, 1864. Now comes a rougher task, with obstacles deployed on every flank. The problem is not the opposition—Democrats such as Fernando Wood (Lee Pace), a former mayor of New York, who wanted the city to secede from the Union and reap a continuing profit from its cotton trade with the Confederacy. The problem is fellow-Republicans, notably Thaddeus Stevens (Tommy Lee Jones), whose perpetual head of abolitionist steam is enough to blow his wig off. He believes in racial equality in the eyes of

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2 of 18

every affair, even more so." As befits a man to the next: the Lincolns' where Stevens is the carriage men. Jackie Earle, the States, cuss a peace coln prays for ore the

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 18-22: Swinging suavity is the hallmark of the singer and pianist Freddy Cole

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St. (212-475-8592)—Dec. 17-Jan. 6: The pop-jazz trumpeter Chris Botti, who recently shared the stage with Barbra Streisand, can now bask in the adoration of his own fan base as he settles in for a three-week engagement.

CORNELIA STREET CAFE

29 Cornelia St. (212-989-9319)—Dec. 21: Adam Kolker, an undervalued saxophonist, forms a trio with two deeply supportive players: the bassist John Hebert and the veteran drummer Billy Hart. Dec. 22: Open Loose, a cooperative threesome that revels in the art of spontaneous group interplay, unites the saxophonist Tony Malaby, the bassist Mark Helias, and the drummer Tom Rainey. Dec. 28-29: Low-register glory from the duo of the tuba player Bob Stewart and the trombonist Ray Anderson.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Dec. 26-31: The seminal recordings of Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven ensembles of the late

ubiquitous figures of the jazz-pop recording sessions of the nineteen-seventies and eighties. The vibraphonist Mike Mainieri, the keyboardist Warren Bernhardt, the guitarist Dave Spinozza, the bassist Tony Levin, and the drummer Steve Gadd may not be as visible as they once were, but they all remain at the top of their game. Dec. 27-31: The fusion-guitar hero Mike Stern welcomes the trumpeter Randy Brecker, the bassist Anthony Jackson, and the drummer Dave Weckl to a special edition of his band.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Dec. 31: The Harlem Renaissance Orchestra lays down the beat in the Allen Room so swing dancers can usher in 2013 in high style.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 18-19: Unerring musicianship and a wicked sense of humor play well together in the hands of the drummer and bandleader Matt Wilson, who finds room in his celebratory "Christmas Tree-O" engagement for the innovative guitarist Bill Frisell. Dec. 21-23: The sleek harmonies and intimate tastes of the New York Voices. Dec. 27-30: Jimmy Cobb, the lone surviving member of the Miles Davis band that recorded "Kind of Blue," one of the most popular jazz albums in history, pays tribute to that release with a quintet that includes the trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, the saxophonist Javon Jackson and

25. ♦ "Artist's Choice: Trisha Donnelly." Through April 8. ♦ "Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955-1972." Through Jan. 28. ♦ "New Photography 2012." Through Feb. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

MOMA PS1

22-25 Jackson Ave., Queens (718-784-2084)—"Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960-1980." Through March 11. ♦ "New Pictures of Common Objects." Through Dec. 31. ♦ "Matt Connors: Impressionism." Through Dec. 31. ♦ "Huma Bhabha: Unnatural Histories." Through April 1. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3587)—"Pissarro Black and White." Through Jan. 23. ♦ "Gabriel Orozco: Asterisms." Through Jan. 13. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—"Wade Guyton: OS." Through Jan. 13. ♦ "Richard Artschwager." Through Feb. 3. ♦ "Sinister Pop." Through Feb. 15. ♦ "Trisha Bagat: Plymouth Rock 2." Through Jan. 27. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)



"Phenomenon at Collis Junction," a watercolor from 1940 and 1950 by Henry Darger, at the Ricco/Maresca gallery.

nineteen-twenties will never grow old. Doffing their hats to this most influential of American music will be two Armstrong devotees, the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and the multi-instrumentalist Vince Giordano.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Dec. 23-31: Michael Feinstein, club owner and champion of the Great American Songbook, bids a final farewell to his home base (it is closing in this location, and is expected to reopen elsewhere in the city next year) with assistance from the Broadway favorite Christine Ebersole.

54 BELOW

254 W. 54th St. (646-476-3551)—Dec. 18-23: Her pop-charting days long behind her, Maureen McGovern has successfully reinvented herself as a valued interpreter of standards and stage fare. Dec. 20-21: Dee Snider, who rose to fame as the lead singer of the heavy-metal band Twisted Sister, sings testosterone-infused showstoppers, as well as holiday favorites. Dec. 23-30: Justin Vivian Bond, who gained notoriety as half of the cabaret duo Kiki & Herb, has lately emerged as an indomitable solo performer, not to mention a gender pioneer: the singer has come out as transgender and uses the neutral pronoun "V." Bond sings rueful, resonant ballads, often punctuated with cruelly funny anecdotes that ramble on—delightfully—past the point of coherence. Dec. 26-29: Old-school charm from the singer and dancer Maurice Hines. Dec. 31: The Broadway diva Patti LaBelle gets to release the vocal power that she had to quell in her dramatic role in David Mamet's "The Anarchist."

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 19-22: L'Image is a quintet that unites formerly

Vincent Herring, and the pianist Larry Willis. Dec. 31: The Mungus Big Band rings in the New Year.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Dec. 18-23: The super bassist Christian McBride, who led a lean trio here last week, expands his horizons with his hard-driving quintet, Inside Straight. Dec. 25-30: The Cedar Walton Trio. Mainstream bop at its most assured, from a no-nonsense veteran pianist. Dec. 31-Jan. 6: A decade plus into their career and no longer the cheeky bad boys of jazz, the Bad Plus trio have morphed into a respected and popular ensemble without losing their cheerfully abrasive edge.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"Matisse: In Search of True Painting." Through March 17. ♦ "Regarding Warhol: Sixty Artists, Fifty Years." Through Dec. 31. ♦ "Bernini: Sculpting in Clay." Through Jan. 6. ♦ "Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop." Through Jan. 27. ♦ "George Bellows." Through Feb. 18. ♦ "Extravagant Inventions: The Princely Furniture of the Rococo." Through Jan. 27. ♦ "African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde." Through April 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925." Opens Dec. 23. ♦ "Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde." Through Feb.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Mickalene Thomas: Origin of the Universe." Through Jan. 20. ♦ "Materializing 'Six Years': Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art." Through Feb. 3. ♦ "Raw/Cooked: Daron Jackson." Through Feb. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 10.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"Our Global Kitchen: Food, Nature, Culture." Through Aug. 11. ♦ "Creatures of Light: Nature's Bioluminescence." Through Jan. 6. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—"Mantegna to Matisse: Master Drawings from the Courtauld Gallery." Through Jan. 27. ♦ "Van Gogh's 'Portrait of a Peasant.'" Through Jan. 20. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—"Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life." Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

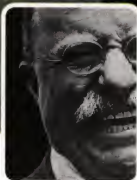
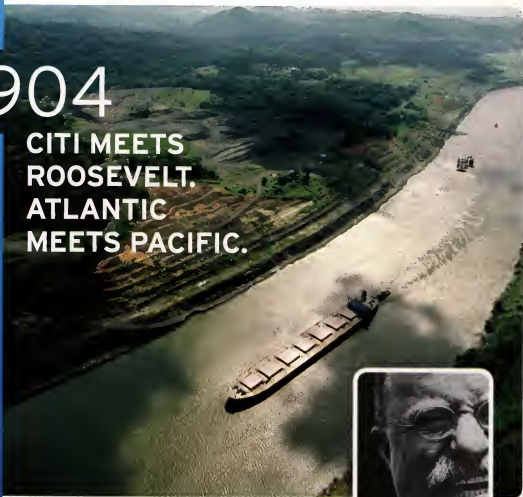
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"Dürer to de Kooning: 100 Master Drawings from Munich." Through Jan. 6. ♦ "Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters." Through Jan. 27. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

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Select New Year's Eve shows, clockwise from top left: Amanda Palmer, Wynton Marsalis and Vince Giordano, Patti LuPone, Nas, Michael Feinstein and Christine Ebersole, the Mingus Big Band, They Might Be Giants, Armin van Buuren, the Punch Brothers, and Phish.

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—"Ferdinand Hodler: View to Infinity." Through Jan. 7. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM

235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—"Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos." Through Jan. 20. ♦ "Judith Bernstein: Hard." Through Jan. 20. ♦ "Come Closer: Art Around the Bowery, 1969-1989." Through Jan. 6. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—"Fore." Through March 10. ♦ "Gordon Parks: A Har-

lem Family 1967." Through March 10. (Open Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

FRED HERZOG

The Vancouver street-scene photographer, active since the nineteen-fifties, was working in color long before it was taken seriously. But Herzog has only recently been added to the pantheon of pioneers that includes William Eggleston, Joel Meyerowitz,

and Stephen Shore. In this show of newly printed images, most of them taken in the fifties and sixties, his command of color and composition feels easy and instinctive, and his results look as effortless as snapshots. This facility is a great part of Herzog's appeal; he knows how to deliver great jolts of red, whether it's in a sleek Corvette or a tattered blanket, and subtler satisfactions too. Through Jan. 26. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

Short List

BYRON DOBELL: Renaissance Studios, 130 W. 57th St. 212-586-8342. Through Dec. 22. PETER

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

BRIDE WARS

"Dancing Around the Bride," the Philadelphia Museum's current exhibition of the work of Marcel Duchamp and his American admirers John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns, is the most



thrilling exhibition I've seen in years. Looking at it, I regretted how much time we all spent trying to explain these men's theoretical innovations: the dethronement of art, the declassifying, decentering. We thought we had to, in order to get people to take an interest in this new kind of art. But we shouldn't do it anymore. Duchamp's nude descended the staircase a hundred years ago. Cage sat down and didn't play "4'33" sixty years ago. Cunningham stuck his foot into Johns's "Numbers" fifty years ago. Most of the public is never going to like such things. Most of the public doesn't like modernism. Let it be. Meantime, the Philadelphia show (on view through Jan. 21) suggests something very untheoretical: how much these artists took from each other, how much fun they had together. In the gift shop, you can buy a candy replica of the moustache Duchamp painted on the Mona Lisa.

—Joan Acocella

NADIN: Horticultural Society of New York, 148 W. 37th St. 212-757-0915. Through Jan. 8. **DAVID SALLE:** Lever House, 390 Park Ave., at 53rd St. Visit leverageartcollection.com for more information. Through Jan. 25. **"THE EVENT OF A THREAD":** Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-933-5812. Through Jan. 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

KELTIE FERRIS

Picture Monet's garden as a graffiti-tagged plot in Bushwick and you get some sense of the grit, bravado, and beauty of these big abstract paintings made of oil, spray paint, and pastel. In nine canvases that range in size from six to nine feet tall, the young Kentucky-born, New York-based artist compresses a century's worth of abstract tendencies in two-dimensional images—from the shimmering smears of Impressionism through Kenneth Noland's chevrons and stains to digital pixelation. Ferris is a natural-born colorist, and her surfaces, while densely layered, rarely feel labored. But, at times, the controlled chaos of the compositions becomes flailing, as if the abundance of energy is more than even the artist herself can rein in. Through Jan. 12. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

DAVID LACHAPPELLE

The photographer has long had a keen, if not entirely healthy, interest in celebrity, so when he heard about an act of vandalism at a Dublin wax museum, he knew he'd found an irresistible subject. The resulting still-lives of slashed and shattered heads and hands are blown up to a ridiculously large scale, and they are as compelling as they are crass. Among the ruins are Michael Jackson, Bill Clinton, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Marlene Dietrich (a finger for Cindy Sherman), but the spectacular thirteen-part series of the decapitated cast of the Last Supper is hard to beat. Through Jan. 19. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474.)

CHRIS MCCAW

Working with large-format cameras of his own design, which he fits with lenses made for military surveillance, McCaw makes unique, extended-exposure pictures of the sun that record both its light and its apparent movement across the sky. (The latter registers as burn marks that slice through the vintage paper on which the images appear.) Although the photographs are landscapes, the details of each location—including Alaska, Galapagos, and the Mojave desert—tend to get lost in a silvery, solarized haze. The ethereal quality of the images and the physicality of the sun-made slashes strike a fine balance between the delicate and the brutal. Through Jan. 19. (Milo, 245 Tenth Ave., at 24th St. 212-414-0370.)

GARY SIMMONS

The artist emerged in the nineties as a star of identity-oriented conceptualism, skewering racial stereotypes in light sculptural tableaux. In this abbreviated twenty-year survey, which does not whet the appetite for more, gold-plated basketball shoes are mounted like trophies on the wall, lawn jockeys in Ku Klux Klan hoods flank a steel gate, and a row of men's dress shoes are draped with shoeshine towels embroidered with figures who pilloried or hijacked black culture: Al Jolson, the crows from "Dumbo," Elvis. More affecting are partially erased chalk drawings on blackboard paint: a mural of vanishing nooses is an eloquent acknowledgment of the difficulties of reconciling a history of atrocities with a narrative of progress. Through Jan. 19. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

Short List

EL ANATSUI: Shannan, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701. Through Jan. 19. **HENRY DARGOER:** Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-4819. Through Feb. 2. **CARROLL DUNHAM:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Jan. 19. **BARNABY FURNAS:** Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889. Through Dec. 21. **PAOLA FERRARIO:** Wester,

511 W. 25th St. 212-255-5560. Through Jan. 12. **MATT KEEGAN AND EILEEN QUINNAN:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through Dec. 22. **CHARLES RAY:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Jan. 12. **ED RUSCHA:** Gagosian, 535 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Jan. 12.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JULIES ALLEN

These terrific black-and-white pictures of Gleason's Gym come from an insider's perspective: Allen lived near and trained at the legendary boxers' hangout in the mid-eighties. His portraits of young, mostly black and Latino men in the ring—eager, battered fighters—fill one long wall. Other photographs feature a colorful supporting cast of older trainers, managers, hustlers, and fans, most of whom look like extras from "Raging Bull." The atmosphere is pungent—you can practically smell the sweat and cigars—and volatile, as Allen uncovers an edge in the camaraderie and reveals the gun in an ankle holster. Through Jan. 5. (Leica Gallery, 670 Broadway, at Bond St. 212-777-3051.)

CHRISTINE HILL

The Gessinkumstwerk goes gemutlich in the Berlin-based artist's installation, a life-size store based on a German children's toy called a *kauldau*. (The show continues the ongoing Volksboutique project, which Hill started in 1996.) Visitors tie on printed aprons, stand behind a cash register, and pretend to sell each other jam jars labelled "cheer," "fulfillment," "vigor," and other priceless qualities. (The jars are filled with homey little items like buttons and plastic figurines.) Posters are printed with quotations from philosophers (Ludwig Wittgenstein) and artists (John Cage). The citation of a line from William Morris can be read as a riposte to the feeding frenzies at art fairs and auctions: "Art is the expression of joy in labor rather than an exclusive luxury." Through Dec. 22. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232.)

AMY O'NEILL

The high point of this lacklustre show by the American artist is a video documenting Holyland, U.S.A., an abandoned Biblical theme park in Connecticut. The camera lingers on the ruins of a fake Walling Wall, a tumble-down shack bears the sign "Herod's Palace." The rest of the installation continues the theme of ersatz monuments. Rows of knee-high pyramids are engraved with acronyms, from I.O.U. to O.M.G., which are probably intended to evoke modern-day hieroglyphs but may instead suggest an Egyptology-themed hole of mini golf. Through Jan. 27. (Swiss Institute, 18 Wooster St. 212-925-2035.)

Short List

ALICE CHANNER: Cooley, 107 Norfolk St. 212-680-0564. Through Dec. 23. **BARB CHOYT:** Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064. Through Dec. 23. **TOM FAIRS:** Schuss, 34 Orchard St. 212-219-9918. Through Dec. 23. **VIKTOR KOPP:** Bureau, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through Dec. 21. **MUNTEAN/ROSENBLUM:** Team, 47 Wooster St. 212-279-9219. Through Dec. 21. **PETER SCHOOLWERTH:** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through Dec. 22.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET / "THE NUTCRACKER"

George Balanchine's production, inspired by the baller he danced as a child in Russia, returns to Lincoln Center. The second act, filled with clever dances, many performed by children, culminates in one of Tchaikovsky's most sumptuous pas de deux. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Dec. 20 and Dec. 26 at 2 and 6, Dec. 20 and Dec. 27 at 6, Dec. 21 at 8, Dec. 22 and Dec. 28-29 at 2 and 8, Dec. 23 and Dec. 30 at 1 and 5, and Dec. 24 at 2.)

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LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO

The ballets performed by this beloved all-male troupe are jokes. But, along with the pratfalls, campy flamboyance, and man-in-a-tutu comedy about size and weight, there are jokes that only true dance fans could appreciate and ballet technique that's no joke at all. Accordingly, the interest in a new excerpt from "Laurencia," a 1939 Soviet ballet about a peasant revolution, lies not just in the potential humor but also in a faithful re-creation of a rarely seen work. It's the centerpiece in the first of two programs of favorites that include "Swan Lake" and the Balanchine parody "Go for Barocco." (Joyce Theatre,

ment of the score—also include allusions to ballet, Hollywood musicals, postmodern dance, and disco. And there are some memorable set pieces, such as a passage of mock ice-skating set to Tchaikovsky's sumptuous snowflake music. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 20-21 at 7:30 and Dec. 22 at 2.)

ROYAL BALLET / "THE NUTCRACKER"

For those who simply cannot get enough of "The Nutcracker," here is yet another version, beamed into theatres from England. The Royal Ballet's staging, created by Peter Wright in 1999, is hyper-traditional, detailed, and grand, with Maris played by a petite adult ballerina on point. This perfor-

of the Met's undoubted triumphs of the past decade was the 2003 production of "Les Troyens," in which the director, Francesca Zambello, succeeded in giving Berlioz's massive two-part opera an appealingly human scale. Filling the shoes of Lorraine Hunt Lieberson in the role of Dido will be another consummate mezzo-soprano, Susan Graham, joined by (among others) Marcello Giordani, as Aeneas, and Deborah Voigt, as Cassandra; Luisi. ♦ Dec. 26 at 11 A.M. and Dec. 27 and Dec. 29 at 7:30; Bartlett Sher's 2006 production of "The Barber of Seville" certainly had its racy moments. Now they'll be toned down for an abridged, family-friendly version, the Met's an-



Ed Ruscha's painting "Gilded, Marbled, and Foibled" (2011-12), in the artist's current show at the Gagosian gallery.

175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 19 at 7:30, Dec. 20-21 and Dec. 22-28 at 8, Dec. 22 and Dec. 29 at 3 and 8, Dec. 23 and Dec. 30 at 3, and Dec. 26 at 7:30. Through Jan. 6.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

The company's final two weeks at City Center offer multiple chances to catch the best new addition to the repertoire (Garth Fagan's "From Before"), the best revival (Ronald K. Brown's "Grace"), and the best additions from last year (Paul Taylor's "Arden Court" and Rennie Harris's "Home"). There are also, as always, plenty of opportunities to see "Revelations" (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 19 at 7:30, Dec. 20-21 and Dec. 27-28 at 8, Dec. 22 and Dec. 29 at 2 and 8, Dec. 26 at 2 and 7:30, and Dec. 30 at 3 and 7:30.)

LEGACY RUSSELL / "INITIATION"

The performance artist, who finds inspiration in everyday social interaction—one of her projects included sleeping on friends' couches for a year—shines a light on our rituals of preparation. What does the way we apply makeup or model shoes in front of a mirror say about us? Russell explores this question in tightly choreographed scenes. (Museum of Arts and Design, 2 Columbus Circle. 212-299-7740. Dec. 20 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

"NUT/CRACKED"

David Parker's revue is an irreverent but tender sendup of the holiday staple. The show, which turns this year, has a scrappy make-do-with-less attitude: performers dance in black sweats and white T-shirts on a bare stage. Tap, in all its guises, is a constant, performed on point, or in top hat and tails. The numbers—set to a jazzy, kitschy arrange-

ment stars the tender Roberta Marquez (so lovely in Ashton's "La Fille Mal Gardée") as the Sugarplum Fairy and the light-footed Steven McRae as her dapper prince. See balletcinema.com for locations nationwide. (Big Cinemas, 239 E. 59th St. 212-371-6682. Clearview Chelsea, 260 W. 23rd St. 212-371-6882. Dec. 23 at 11 A.M.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Dec. 19 and Dec. 28 at 7:30 and Dec. 22 at 8: To encounter Sonja Frisell's awe-inspiring production of "Aida"—the sets, the supernumeraries—is an essential New York experience. The final performances this season feature Hui He in the title role, balanced by the Amneris of Dolores Zazick and the Radamès of Roberto Alagna; Fabio Luisi, the Met's principal conductor, is on the podium. ♦ Dec. 20 at 7:30: The men of Mozart's "Don Giovanni" often stand to one side while the three women execute a parade of crowd-pleasing arias, but in the Met's current revival of Michael Grandage's blandly conservative production, the fellows—Charles Castronovo, Ildar Abdrazakov, and, particularly, Erwin Schrott, as the Don's sidekick, Leporello—step into the spotlight. Susanna Phillips, an uneven but forthright Donna Anna, excels among the women; Edward Gardner. (This is the final performance.) ♦ Dec. 21 and Jan. 1 at 6, Dec. 26 at 6:30, and Dec. 29 at 11 A.M.: One

nual holiday presentation; J. D. McClatchy's English libretto, commissioned for the occasion, should provide plenty of fizz on its own. The appealing Rodion Pogossow, Isabel Leonard, and Alek Shradet take the leading roles; Yves Abel. ♦ Dec. 31 at 6:30: The concept of staging three of Donizetti's operas about Tudor queens was a brilliant vehicle for the talents of Beverly Sills during the golden age of New York City Opera. In a new era, the Met has given control of the effort to the director David McVicar; the second of the three, "Maria Stuarda," will feature the splendid mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato in the title role, with the soprano Elsa van den Hever as the Queen of Scots' nemesis, Elizabeth I. Matthew Polenzani, Joshua Hopkins, and Matthew Rose complete the cast; Maurizio Benini. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMORE OPERA: "LA BOHÈME"

This hardy successor to the bumptious Amato Opera is blazing its own trail, gamely mixing belcanto premieres with classic revivals. Puccini's bittersweet fable of old Paris is the holiday show; Gregory Ortega conducts. (Connolly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. 888-811-4111. Dec. 27-29 and Dec. 31 at 7:30 and Dec. 30 at 2:30. Through Jan. 6.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

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distinctive performances of Handel's sacred "entertainment." Kent Tittle, New York's reigning choral conductor, is its music director; the fine vocal soloists are Kathryn Lewek, Kirsten Solle, Nicholas Phan, and Matt Boehler. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 20 and Dec. 23 at 8.) ♦ The New York Philharmonic has a distinguished "Messiah" tradition of its own, with the orchestra's hefty trimmed down to a big-Baroque size and the New York Choral Artists offering their usual expertise in Handelian matters. Gary Thor Wedow, a local favorite making his Philharmonic debut, is the conductor this year; another debutante, the radiant young Met soprano Layla Claire, leads the vocal soloists, who also include the countertenor Tim Mead (another debut), the tenor Kenneth Tarver, and the bass Alastair Miles. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 18-22 at 7:30.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
With the balance of the orchestra occupied in "Messiah" performances, a large chamber ensemble breaks off to play one of the Philharmonic's new-music programs. The repertoire, refreshingly, is all-American: new works by Andy Akiho and Jude Vachlavik ("Shock Waves"), a New York premiere from Andrew Norman, and a classic piece by the late Jacob Druckman based on poems by Dickinson and Apollinaire ("Counterpoise," with the soprano Elizabeth Futrell); Joyce Ogren, making his Philharmonic debut, conducts. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 21 at 7. ♦ Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-875-5656. Dec. 22 at 8.) ♦ Marvin Hamlisch will be dearly missed. He may never have reached the inventive heights of a Rodgers or a Sondheim, but his achievements as a Broadway and Hollywood composer, and his skills as a music director, were universally first-class; few of America's top talents have been as broad. His unfadingly ebullient music will turn what might have been a memorial concert into a festive New Year's Eve gala, with such artists as Joshua Bell, Michael Feinstein, Audra McDonald, Josh Groban, and Frederica von Stade performing excerpts from such shows as "A Chorus Line" and "Sweet Smell of Success"; the invaluable Paul Gemignani conducts a production directed by Lonny Price. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 31 at 7:30.)

DANIEL HOPE

The British violinist, an artist of both dazzle and depth, is having his way in New York this week. His first haunt is Greenwich Village's (Le) Poisson Rouge, where he solos in the British composer Max Richter's "recomposed" version of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons," backed by Ensemble LPR. (158 Bleecker St. lprny.com. Dec. 19-20 at 7:30.) ♦ Hope heads uptown to the Metropolitan Museum, where he tucks into tradition, performing an all-Bach concert with another standout violinist, Karen Gomyo; they're backed by the Salomé Chamber Orchestra, which plays on instruments from the Museum's Sau-Wing Lam collection of violins and violas. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 22 at 7.)

THE CROSSING: "THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL PASSION"

David Lang's Pulitzer Prize-winning piece sets Hans Christian Andersen's story of a poor beggar girl who suffers a debilitating stroke and becomes dependent on her husband (Jean-Louis Trintignant). Co-starring Isabelle Huppert. In French. Opening Dec. 19. (In limited release.)

NEW YORK STRING ORCHESTRA

Carnegie Hall's beloved holiday tradition is back, with Jaime Laredo conducting a group of young virtuosos on strings, winds, and brass in two programs. The first, with the pianist Jonathan Biss, features music by Mozart, Beethoven (the Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major), and Haydn (the Symphony No. 104, "London"); the second offers concertos by Saint-Saëns and Mozart (with the cellist Cécile Parnas and the clarinetist Anthony McGill, respectively), Mendelssohn's "Hebrides" Overture, and a selection of Dvořák's "Slavonic Dances." (212-247-7800. Dec. 24 at 7 and Dec. 28 at 8.)

ST. THOMAS CHOIR:

"A CEREMONY OF CAROLS"

John Scott's outstanding Anglican choir makes a big noise with "Messiah" each year, but as Christmas comes near the boys hold their own with a concert that centers on Britten's winsome masterwork for treble voices and harp. John Rutter's "Dancing Day" completes the program. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. saintthomascurch.org. Dec. 20 at 5:30.)

RECITALS

"THE END OF THE WORLD"

Two of Gotham's leading new-music outfits, American Modern Ensemble and the percussion group Talujon, bravely defy the Mayan calendar to present a concert of contemporary works. Included are pieces by (among others) Hannah Shih, Eric Nathan, Robert Paterson, and the late George Rochberg ("Contra Mortem et Tempus"); free wine softens the blow. (DiMenna Center, 450 W. 37th St. americanmodernensemble.org. Dec. 21 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC

The floating chamber-music series is an especially cozy place during the holidays. Dec. 24 at 8: Steven Beck, one of the barge's favorite pianists, takes to the Steinway for his annual performance of Bach's Goldberg Variations. ♦ Dec. 31 at 7: Bach continues to set the tone for the holidays, with the series' director, Mark Peskanov, accompanied by Beck on New Year's Eve in the composer's complete Sonatas for Violin and Keyboard, BWV 1014-1019. As on Christmas Eve, cider, cookies, and chocolates are complimentary. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. For full schedule and ticket information see bargemusic.org.)

PARTHENIA: "AS IT FELL ON A HOLIE EVE"
Over Christmastide, Trinity Church offers a stream of concerts. One of the most alluring is offered by the elite consort of viols, which, with the soprano Julianne Baird as guest artist, performs a selection of songs, dances, and carols by composers of Elizabethan England—including the master of them all, William Byrd. (Broadway at Wall St. Dec. 27 at 7:30. Tickets at the door.)

ARTE: "MOZARTIAN MASTERPIECES"
The harpsichordist Gwendolyn Toth's long-established period-performance ensemble begins the march out of the holiday season with a bevy of works by the world's favorite eighteenth-century composer; Toth conducts a specially enlarged ensemble in an ambitious program offering the Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, the motet "Exultate, Jubilate," and the Keyboard Concerto No. 21 in C Major. (Immanuel Lutheran Church, 122 E. 88th St. gemsny.org. Dec. 29 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

AMOUR

A drama, directed by Michael Haneke, about an elderly woman (Emmanuelle Béart) who suffers a debilitating stroke and becomes dependent on her husband (Jean-Louis Trintignant). Co-starring Isabelle Huppert. In French. Opening Dec. 19. (In limited release.)

BARBARA

Christian Petzold directed this drama, set in East Germany in the eighties, about a dissident doctor (Nina Hoss) who is under surveillance in a provincial town. In German. Opening Dec. 21. (In limited release.)

DIJANGO UNCHAINED

Quentin Tarantino directed this Western, about a freed slave (Jamie Foxx) who seeks to rescue his wife (Kerry Washington) from a Southern plantation owner (Leonardo DiCaprio) by joining forces with a bounty hunter (Christoph Waltz). Opening Dec. 25. (In wide release.)

THE GUILT TRIP

Seth Rogen stars in this comedy, as an inventor whose brief car ride with his mother (Barbra Streisand) becomes a picaresque adventure. Directed by Anne Fletcher. Opening Dec. 19. (In wide release.)

THE IMPOSSIBLE

A thriller, directed by Juan Antonio Bayona, based on the true story of a family's survival of the 2004 tsunami in Thailand. Starring Naomi Watts, Ewan McGregor, and Tom Holland. Opening Dec. 21. (In wide release.)

JACK REACHER

Tom Cruise stars in this thriller, as a detective who searches for a serial killer. Directed by Christopher McQuarrie; co-starring Rosamund Pike and Richard Jenkins. Opening Dec. 21. (In wide release.)

LES MISÉRABLES

An adaptation of the stage musical based on the novel by Victor Hugo, starring Hugh Jackman, as the freed convict Jean Valjean, and Anne Hathaway, as the prostitute Fantine. Directed by Tom Hooper; co-starring Amanda Seyfried and Russell Crowe. Opening Dec. 25. (In wide release.)

NOT FADE AWAY

This coming-of-age story, about an aspiring rock musician (John Magaro) in New Jersey in the early nineteen-sixties, is the first feature film directed by David Chase, the creator of "The Sopranos." Co-starring James Gandolfini and Jack Huston. Opening Dec. 21. (In limited release.)

ON THE ROAD

An adaptation of Jack Kerouac's novel about a life-changing road trip, directed by Walter Salles and starring Garrett Hedlund, Sam Riley, and Kristen Stewart. Opening Dec. 21. (In limited release.)

PROMISED LAND

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 28. (In limited release.)

TABU

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 26. (In limited release.)

THIS IS 40

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 21. (In wide release.)

WEST OF MEMPHIS

Amy Berg directed this documentary, about the West Memphis Three, young men whose conviction for murders committed in 1993 proved dubious. Opening Dec. 25. (In limited release.)

ZERO DARK THIRTY

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 19. (In limited release.)

NOW PLAYING**ANNA KARENINA**

The compressing of Tolstoy's novel, in all its moral largesse, is a challenge that has long tempted filmmakers. The latest director to attempt the impossible is Joe Wright. Working from a script by Tom Stoppard, he has squeezed the action into the compass of a theatre; we watch the characters move around sets, among stage flats. At times, the scene broadens out into fresh air; a toy train becomes a genuine one, steaming into Moscow station, and Levin (Dornhall Gleeson) is seen scything his fields under a real, unpainted sky. The metaphorical force of this conceit—insisting on the artifice of the social world that frowns on rapture—is not hard to grasp, but its frailty unsettles some of the actors. Aaron Taylor-Johnson delivers a foppish and unproductive Vronsky, and, in the title role, Keira Knightley rarely seems as lost in the dream of love as some Tolstoyans would hope. Stronger performances come from Jude Law, unusually monkish in the role of Karenin, and Matthew Macfadyen as the bumptious Oblonsky, who survives through sheer worldliness and good health.—*Anthony Lane* (In limited release.)

ARGO

Ben Affleck directs and stars in a film about a film that never was. When the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was stormed by Iranian protesters, in late 1979, six people managed to flee and take refuge with the Canadian Ambassador; this is the story of how they got out of the country. Affleck plays a C.I.A. man who, with the aid of a Hollywood producer (Alan Arkin) and a master of makeup and disguise (John Goodman), puts together a science-fiction movie—or, at least, enough



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of a movie to convince the Iranians of the need for a location shoot, with the hostages playing the crew. Nothing about this saga is more preposterous than the fact that it worked, but Affleck, in his direction as in his own performance, plays it straight; when, like his heroes, he risks a little stretching of the truth—the climactic scenes at the Tehran airport, for instance, become much tauter than they actually were—you feel at once thrilled and manipulated. The cinematography, by Rodrigo Prieto, honors the twin tones of the story: coarse and fretful for the world of the captive Americans, smooth and saturated for the prospective rescuers back home. Connoisseurs of

a quasi-Biblical power, a sort of frontier Exodus that's filmed with a majestic passion for the wild lands and for its indigenous dwellers. It's centered on a Cheyenne tribe that was forced to leave its ancestral homeland in the northwest and relocated to the desert, under the watchful eye of the U.S. Army, with the promise of a return home. In 1878, when the promise went unkept, the surviving members of the ordeal defy the government and make the trek home, confronting the danger of mass slaughter by the Army—and one officer, Captain Thomas Archer (Richard Widmark), puts his career on the line to save them, even as the Quaker schoolteacher he loves

**ON AND OFF THE AVENUE
MENSCIENCE**



329 Lafayette St. (212-219-3525)—Little boys may be one with slugs and snails and puppy-dog tails, but these days big boys are partial to anti-aging lotions, lip-protection balm, and eye-gel masks. Since 2004, MenScience's antecuticals—their word, not mine—have been available online, as well as at outlets such as Barneys and Nordstrom. (One of MenScience's largest markets is in South Korea, where twenty-one per cent of all men's cosmetics in the world are purchased.) As of a few months ago, these unguents and nutritional supplements can be purchased at the company's virile-looking NoHo snuggery, where, on Fridays and Saturdays, you can also get a shave or a haircut downstairs (\$30, \$40, respectively). The shop, fashioned from black steel and dark-stained wood planks, is decorated sparsely, with a couple of weathered boxing gloves, a smattering of mini-cacti, an antique barber's chair, and a dog bowl that says "Stud."

The simply packaged products—white containers with accents of gray and pale orange—are displayed in a grid of cubbies that line two of the walls, evoking the medicine cabinet of a giant with O.C.D. "Men come here with issues," the head of retail and sales, Lili Fonticoba, said

the other day. "They may have acne or dry skin," she continued, "and they come here for answers." The day I dropped by MenScience, a sleep-deprived man in a red windbreaker came in for a cream to treat the dark circles under his eyes, then decided that \$37 was too much to pay for Eye Rescue Formula. He walked out instead with Hair Styling Pomade (\$22) and Buff Body Gloves, for exfoliating in the shower (\$13). Another customer bought special deodorant (\$17) to apply to the sweaty skin beneath his watchband, suffering from a condition that he diagnosed as "funky wrist." A woman popped her head in the door, asking if the store carried talcum powder. They do not, but they have take-free body powder (\$16). "Ten per cent of our customers are women," the store manager, Christian Huaman, said, explaining that MenScience is less expensive than comparable women's skin-care lines and that its products contain no dyes and fragrances. "The only smell you'll smell on me is laundry," he said. "My girlfriend uses more of this stuff than I do because skin is skin, for the most part."

—Patricia Marx

bad male fashion will faint with joy. With Victor Garber.—A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/15/12.) (In wide release.)

THE CENTRAL PARK FIVE

A brilliant documentary reconstruction of what happened in Central Park on the night of April 19, 1989, when a twenty-eight-year-old jogger, Trisha Meili, an investment banker at Salomon Brothers, was beaten, raped, and left comatose, after which five boys from Harlem (Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Korey Wise, Yusef Salaam, and Raymond Santana) were arrested for the crime, separated, and interrogated for twenty-four hours. At the end of the interrogations, four of the five boys confessed, and all five were tried, convicted, and sent to prison—but, in 2002, a man named Matias Reyes confessed to the crime. Made by Ken Burns, his producer, David McMahon, and Burns's daughter, Sarah, who wrote a book about the events, the movie intercuts recent interviews with the wrongly convicted men and excerpts from their taped confessions. It is perhaps the most devastating portrait of social inequality ever presented in a contemporary American documentary. The black and Hispanic boys and their families were helpless to fight the system that ensnared them. With expert commentary by the journalist Jim Dwyer, who was writing for *Newsday* at the time, and the social psychologist Saul Kassin.—David Denby (12/10/12) (In limited release.)

CHEYENNE AUTUMN

The rueful, elegiac grandeur of John Ford's final Western, from 1964, arises from a true story of

(Carroll Baker) leaves the Army outpost to travel with them. Ford films Native American ways with devotion and respect; while also maintaining deep admiration for the military, he sets its code of obedience under a higher morality and the authority of civilian government. Among the heroes are the Secretary of the Interior, Carl Schurz (Edward G. Robinson), a former Civil War general who invokes the memory of his late friend Abraham Lincoln, and Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday (James Stewart and Arthur Kennedy), a pair of jokers who conceal their principles and their wisdom with a poker face.—Richard Brody (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Dec. 30 and Jan. 1.)

HITCHCOCK

Anthony Hopkins credibly replicates the Master of Suspense's lofty humor, poignant inhibition, and creative viry in Sacha Gervasi's lively, peculiarly engaging docudrama about the making of "Psycho." It's the story of a lifelong insider forced to work on his own—risking his own money on a project that the studio wouldn't back—as well as a tale of the director's now familiar power relations and sexual obsessions with his stars and his long-unacknowledged artistic dependence on his wife, Alma Reville (Helen Mirren). Gervasi's workmanlike direction and the by-the-numbers storytelling don't diminish the impact of a tale that, even in its bare outlines, is one for the ages. Inspiration strikes in fantasy sequences of Hitchcock's fascination with Ed Gein, the real-life serial killer on whom Norman Bates is loosely based,

and, above all, in a brief but indelible aside, near the end, in which Hitchcock, alone, conducts one of his most famous set pieces like a mad musician. This ecstatic moment of art-made-life is an instant anthology piece. With Scarlett Johansson, as the well-mannered Janet Leigh, and Jessica Biel, who brings stifled anger to the role of Vera Miles, a onetime muse in disfavor. Based on a nonfiction book by Stephen Rebello.—R.B. (In wide release.)

THE HOBBIT: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY
A long film about short people, Tolkien's famous work of 1937, at once galloping and economical, has been turned by Peter Jackson into a trilogy of hefty movies, of which this is the first. Why the expansion? Could it be that Warner Bros., like the dwarves at the heart of the story, is compelled above all by the lust for treasure? By necessity, much of the dash of the original has been slowed, and the moral shape that Tolkien devised—whereby the dwarves, for all their courage, are corrupted by their quest—has yet to emerge. But by no means has all been lost. Andy Serkis's digital incarnation of Gollum still glistens with pathos and threat, Ian McKellen continues to tower in undisguised amusement over the action, while Martin Freeman, alert and trim, brings a quickness of thought and gesture to the part of Bilbo Baggins and tautens the conundrum behind the whole adventure—should he stay or should he go? Also on hand, and running in the Viggo Mortensen groove, is Richard Armitage, who, as Thorin Oakenshield, somehow performs the near-impossible task of depicting a hot hairy dwarf. The movie was shot at forty-eight frames per second, so we get to see every hair of every beard. This does not, as rumor unkindly suggested, induce nausea in the viewer, but it does arouse a yearning, however fruitless, for the mist of the unattainable that drifted through Tolkien's great dream.—A.L. (12/17/12) (In wide release.)

HIDE PARK ON HUDSON

A gently satirical Anglo-American historical entertainment. In the summer of 1939, King George VI (Samuel West) and Queen Elizabeth (Olivia Colman) visit F.D.R.'s ancestral home to beg for support as Britain prepares to fight Germany. Their majesties are required to eat something called a "hot dog" and to watch an Indian beat a tom-tom. They also bear witness to the peculiar sexual arrangements in the house, in which Roosevelt (Bill Murray), carried from room to room by a servant, appears to be having relations with his secretary, Missy LeHand (Elizabeth Marvel), and also with his distant cousin Daisy Suckley (Laura Linney). The playwright Richard Nelson, basing his script on Suckley's diaries, makes her the narrator and heroine, but unfortunately she's of very little interest. Murray displays his teeth, throws back his head, laughs constantly, and speaks in Hudson Valley patrician tones. He gets F.D.R.'s charm and the manipulative cynicism underneath it, but the script doesn't offer a suggestion as to the President's greatness. It's a pleasant, capable, rather trivial movie. With Olivia Williams, as the free-talking Eleanor Roosevelt. Directed by Roger Michell.—D.D. (12/10/12) (In limited release.)

THE KILLING OF A CHINESE BOOKIE

John Cassavetes, who made much of his money performing in action films, put that experience to work as the director of this hard, brooding crime drama from 1976. Ben Gazzara stars as Cosmo Vitelli, the owner and impresario of a strip joint, who, as the story begins, has just got out from under the burden of a debt to a loan shark when he gambles himself into a hole again. Pressured by a gangland consortium led by a grinning and gladdening yet haunted goon (Timothy Carey) and the folksy, aply named Mort (Seymour Cassel), Cosmo finds himself holding an untraceable .45 en route to doing the deed of the title. Cassavetes captures the gambler's fatalistic joy in playing out to the bitter end a tragedy of his own making, and, reveling in the romantic solitude of the hunter and the hunted, presents a gun battle as a metal-and-concrete ballet. At the club, Cosmo's afflictions are mirrored by the routines of his painted, dandyish

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NewYorkTimes.com, March 28, 2012.
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m.c., Mr. Sophistication (Mende Roberts), an artiste of degraded, obsolete charm, whose capella renditions of Hollywood chestnuts evoke the ramshackle pursuit of an impossible dream.—R.B. (Anthony Film Archives; Dec. 20 and Dec. 23.)

KILLING THEM SOFTLY

Ignore the title, which sounds like a Roberta Flack tribute album and bears no resemblance to the timbre of the film. It is adapted from "Cogan's Trade," by George V. Higgins, whose novels are full of killing but no perceptible softness. Cogan (Brad Pitt) is a hero of sorts, who is hired to resolve a problem. Two lowlives (Scoot McNairy and Ben Mendelsohn) have raided a gambling den and made off with the winnings; they need to pay for their sins, as does Markie Trattman (Ray Liotta), who runs the game, even though, on this occasion, he didn't sin at all. Cogan delegates one of the tasks to a murderous slob (James Gandolfini) from out of town; they have a long conversation over drinks, and then, some time later, we learn in passing that the slob wasn't up to the job. That is typical Higgins, with subplots hitting dead ends or trailing away in talk; the writer and director, Andrew Dominik, has honored the novelist's trademark blend of dirty eloquence and sudden bursts of brutality, with hardly a cop (or a woman) in sight. As a result, only seldom is the film exciting; instead, it gradually unveils a panorama of bleakness, contrasted—all too obviously—with a litany of political posters and sound bites, most of them promising a bright future that we know will never dawn. With Richard Jenkins.—A.L. (12/3/12) (In wide release.)

LIFE OF PI

The four-hundred-and-fifty-pound Bengal tiger that appears in Ang Lee's movie is, of course, a digital beast. What else could it be? You cannot train a tiger to act, although the great teacher Stella

Adler did a good job with Marlon Brando. The cat is fast, beautiful, and hungry. The centerpiece of this adaptation of Yann Martel's prize-winning 2001 novel is a long confrontation, on a lonely lifeboat, between the tiger and an Indian teenage boy named Pi (Suraj Sharma), which turns into a kind of wary cohabitation. The story is improbable (meant to be seen as a fable), but Lee has filmed it with so much moment-to-moment physical detail and so bounteous a celebration of the natural world that the film, at its best, becomes one of the great big-screen adventures. The metafictional setup—in which a novelist hears the story from Pi, now a middle-aged émigré in Canada—is lame, even pious. It's the central adventure that counts. In luscious 3-D.—D.D. (11/26/12) (In wide release.)

LINCOLN

Shuffling in the footsteps of Henry Fonda, Raymond Massey, and many others, Daniel Day-Lewis makes a striking Lincoln—amused and agonized, instinctively concerned for others yet prone to withdraw into the shell of his own thoughts. Steven Spielberg's movie, scripted by Tony Kushner, is unexpectedly right in scope, homing in on the fight to pass the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, in 1865. We are in the final act not just of the war but of the President's own life; that may account for the deep grays in which Janusz Kaminski, the cinematographer, cloaks the film, as if people were already in mourning. Much of the action unfolds in smoky interiors, as Lincoln and his Secretary of State (David Strathairn) use every means to conjure the votes that they need; this even entails hiring a gang of enforcers (Tim Blake Nelson, John Hawkes, and a flamboyant James Spader) to twist recalcitrant arms. The cast lends fearsome weight, led by a bearish Tommy Lee Jones as Thaddeus Stevens; if Sally Field's depiction of

Mary Lincoln strikes a more highly wrought note, that is nonetheless true to the First Lady's ache of unease in her public role. The movie itself feels alive with disquiet, torn between its duty to tell an earthy, complex tale and—as so often with Spielberg—the urge to break free and rise to the realm of myth.—A.L. (11/19/12) (In wide release.)

PLAYTIME

For this 1967 film, Jacques Tati—the unsurpassed satirist of technology's inhuman allure—built a grandiose, gleaming glass-and-steel skyscraper city on the outskirts of Paris and conceived his comic crises in the details of its disproportions. In the two zones of action (they hardly count as stories), Tati plays Monsieur Hulot, a tall, spring-jointed, aging Everyman who goes to see a bureaucrat about a document, while a busload of American tourists blithely disembark in a Paris of iconic landmarks that they see only fleetingly as distant reflections in glass doors. The spectacular settings give rise to desire and its frustration when, in the neon twilight, Hulot's weary glance through the windows of parallel buses meets that of Barbara (Barbara Dennek), a fresh-scrubbed young American. Emotions, identities, and even bodily functions are distorted by the mechanized uniformity, but Tati's despair is modulated by a sense of wonder. A grimly modern night spot is trashed by an American tycoon's anarchic revelry—an alternative International Style—and romantic possibilities arise from the wreckage. In French, English, and German.—R.B. (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Dec. 22 and Dec. 27.)

PROMISED LAND

This drama, directed by Gus Van Sant, stars Matt Damon as a corporate salesman who puts on folksy airs as he travels with a partner (Frances McDormand) through Midwestern farm country to buy drilling rights from struggling farmers for an en-

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ergy company that intends to extract natural gas by way of fracking. The film, based on a story by Dave Eggers and a script by Damon and John Krasinski (who co-stars as an environmental activist), leaves no doubt as to where it stands regarding the dangers of the technique—as well as on the predatory wiles of the remote, uninvolved executives of companies who practice and promote it—but the representatives are depicted as decent people honorably serving a bad cause. The rigidly oriented story is adorned with lively, engaging, understated performances (especially by Rosemary DeWitt, as a local schoolteacher), an avid eye for small-town settings and the glowing light of country landscapes, and a poignant embrace—just skirting nostalgia—of quieter times and simpler ways, even as it acknowledges the big-city ways that can thrive there (and that the region needs in order to thrive again). Whatever ambiguity the movie's core lacks is rebalanced at the surface; its organic textures are woven on a consciously synthetic frame.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

RUST AND BONE

The new film from Jacques Audiard, the director of "A Prophet," stars Marion Cotillard as Stéphanie, a young woman who suffers a terrible and disabling accident. Since she works with killer whales at a marine park, this may seem like an occupational hazard, but it strips her of spirit and morale. Salvation comes in the hulking, unlikely shape of Ali (Matthias Schoenaerts), who numbers bare-knuckle boxing among his gifts. What ensues is a rough and halting love story, set in the scruffy margins of the Côte d'Azur, and fired by a renewal of faith in the joys of sex and other essential functions; if some of Audiard's story lines proceed via melodrama, we let them pass, mainly because the two leads throw themselves, body and soul (or body because of soul), into the turmoil of the tale. The cinematography, rich in shadow and dazzle, is by Stéphane Fontaine.—*A.L.* (12/3/12) (In limited release.)

SALO

Pier Paolo Pasolini's last film, from 1975, is also in a way the ultimate film: its representation of depravity may be unsurpassable. Pasolini sets the Marquis de Sade's "120 Days of Sodom" in 1944-1945, in a sumptuous villa in Mussolini's Republic of Salò, the Nazi puppet regime of northern Italy, where four potentates bring a phalanx of young men and women to submit to their unlimited power and pleasure. In the stately grand salon, with its paintings and piano, two grandes dames lyrically recite Sadean tales of its obscene degradation to the accompaniment of Chopin as the men observe the rituals of the house—rape, torture, coprophagy, mutilation, and murder—which Pasolini depicts clearly, unflinchingly, even lyrically. Shifting the viewer's identification to the killers, Pasolini suggests that the classical values of Western civilization and the ostensibly progressive modernity that's based on them are steeped in the blood of innocents. This film is essential to have seen but impossible to watch: a viewer may find life itself debased by the redemption by the simple fact that such things can be shown or even imagined.—*R.B.* (MOMA, Dec. 27.)

SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK

David O. Russell's sort-of comedy is pretty much a miscalculation from beginning to end. Russell's hero is a young history teacher, Pat (Bradley Cooper), who is released from a Baltimore hospital after eight months of treatment for bipolar disorder. At home with his parents, he talks nonstop about his wife, who has left him, and he throws "A Farewell to Arms" through a closed window in the middle of the night and then wakes up Mom (Jacki Weaver) and Dad (Robert De Niro) to talk about the book's plot. Pat is mainly just silly and infantile—a self-absorbed manic chatterbox. What's supposed to be clinically wrong with him as a person is inseparable from what is merely tiresome in him as a movie character. Things improve a bit when the tough, direct Jennifer Lawrence shows up as a young neighborhood widow who unaccountably pursues him. The film turns into a kind of stuttering romantic comedy, but at the rhythms are off. Russell overloads scenes with chatter and fights; the movie

nags at you. As Pat, Sr., De Niro creates more noise, as a furiously superstitious sports nut who makes wild bets on games and is always in a foul temper.—*D.D.* (11/26/12) (In limited release.)

SKYFALL

The fiftieth anniversary of the mother and father of all franchises is marked by a gloomy, "dark" action thriller, almost completely without the cynical playfulness that drew us to the Bond series in the first place. The movie offers portraits of the end: the possible termination of 007 (Daniel Craig) and also of the Tennyson-quoting M (Judi Dench); it suggests, too, the looming irrelevance of M.I.6, which turns out to be just another station in a world of infinitely hackable networks. The enemy this time is no more than an ex-agent of M.I.6, Raoul Silva (Javier Bardem), a giggling, blond creep who releases the names of other agents and caresses Bond's knees (the two acts of aggression are given equal weight). He looks like a cross between Julian Assange and Andy Warhol. The movie is mildly entertaining, but the Bond franchise has long been overtaken by its rivals, and many of the action sequences, including an apparent death by drowning, seem borrowed from other recent movies ("Bourne" for the watery plunge). With Ben Whishaw, as a very young Q. Directed by Sam Mendes.—*D.D.* (11/19/12) (In wide release.)

TABU

A brilliantly nuanced, deeply imagined psychoexcavation of modern Europe by the Portuguese director Miguel Gomes. In calm and workaday Lisbon, Pilar (Teresa Madruga), a lonely, low-key, middle-aged social activist, gently pursued by a gentleman artist, finds her elderly neighbor, Aurora (Laura Soveral), a capricious faded beauty, in decline and struggling under the loving care of her housekeeper. On her deathbed, Aurora divulges the name and address of a man who, once found, delivers a tale of his encounter with her—a romantic whooper, from Portugal's long-lost African colonies, which he narrates while images of them

unfold like a silent movie, with sound effects only. In Gomes's ingenious vision, the smoothed-out, tampered-down, serenely cultured solitude of the modern city, with its air of constructive purpose in tiny orbits, rests on a dormant volcano of passionate memories packed with adventurous misdeeds, both political and erotic. Filming in suave, charcoal-matte black-and-white, he frames the poignant mini-melodramas of daily life with a calmly analytical yet tenderly unironic eye. If today's neurotic tensions come off as a corrective to past crimes, even a form of repentance, Gomes's historical reconstruction of corrupted grandeur is as much a personal liberation as a form of civic therapy. In Portuguese and English.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

THE TWILIGHT SAGA:

BREAKING DAWN—PART 2

The fifth and final chapter in the gothic netherworld romance is a feast of ripe dialogue and blood-sucking action. Kristen Stewart, as the hooded-eyed Bella, finally gets to vamp it up with her Captain of Team Edward co-star, Robert Pattinson, as they fight to keep their vampire child from the hands of the evil Volturi, who find the child an abomination. The film, directed by Bill Condon, gathers some delicious momentum (complete with lots of blood-feeding) as it builds to its big showdown, and plays to the pictorial strengths of the series' dark and windy Pacific Northwest settings. The over-the-top dramatic sweep allows for some energized performances, particularly from Michael Sheen, a vampire leader who is every inch a king (of camp). The ludicrously entertaining spirit of Stephanie Meyer's novel runs rampant here, and there's much to enjoy, with one caveat: No boys allowed.—*Bruce Dienes* (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE GIRL: In limited release. **THE LOVING STORY:** Mayles Cinema. **RISE OF THE GUARDIANS:** In wide release. **SAVE THE DATE:** In wide release.

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TABLES FOR TWO OOTOYA

8 W. 18th St. (212-255-0018)—To the Westerner, it can seem as if there are two contrary Japans—one a slow, peaceful land of Shinto shrines and tea ceremonies, the other a jangling zone of automation, neon signs, and a bullet train packed with commuters. Most of New York's notable Japanese restaurants work hard to evoke the almost intimidating refinement of the former. But now comes Ootoya, a chain restaurant that has a hundred outlets in Tokyo and two hundred more across Asia. Just as the classic New York diner serves everything from chicken Cordon Bleu to gyros and hamburgers, so Ootoya presents seemingly the whole of Japanese cuisine—yakitori, noodles, sushi, hot pots, and, for that matter, hamburgers. Known as *hambaga* in Japan—say it out loud—hamburger is often eaten without the bun, and Ootoya's version comes in a thick demi-glace sauce.

The décor, with beams set into the walls and a wood-paneled ceiling, evokes a classic *izakaya*, or sake bar. The place is reliably packed with Japanese expats in search of home comforts. (There are no reservations, and there's usually a wait.) In the Japanese way, diners are announced when seated, eliciting a resounding "irasshaimase" ("Welcome") from the kitchen. Appetizers include classic Japanese bar food such as *ika no shikarata*, strips of raw squid dressed in sauce of its own fermented viscera. Definitely an acquired taste, its appearance and flavor resemble that of a well-rotted apple. Equally unfamiliar but more

immediately palatable is a dish of cold soba noodles with *tororo*, a kind of mountain yam. Grating turns the yam to a pulp of unbelievable stickiness. (Wikipedia claims that it was used as a sexual lubricant in the Edo period—a fact too good to check.) The soba end up bound so firmly together that pulling a few strands with chopsticks lifts the whole mass off the plate.

Main dishes can be ordered either on their own or *teishoku*, on a lacquered tray with various sides (miso soup, rice, pickles, and so on). Ootoya's grilled and fried dishes are sinfully good. Yakitori skewers of chicken skin and (especially) tail are succulent little delivery devices for fat. (Yakitori okra is worth trying, too.) Several dishes feature fantastically tender pork cutlet under a perfectly golden shell of panko bread crumbs. If the kitchen seems to have the oil end of the taste spectrum down, dishes involving water fare less well. Pickles, usually so crunchy and delicate in Japanese cooking, here seem waterlogged and tired. Sushi and sashimi—hardly the restaurant's focus, admittedly—are lackluster. But those who want fish have an exciting option in *hanabishi*, which mixes sashimi with more of that mountain yam, plus other mucilaginous ingredients, like fermented soybeans, eggs, and okra. The result is a pungent symphony of slime. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Main courses \$10-\$32.)

—Leo Carey

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Ben Gazzara. Dec. 19 and Dec. 22 at 6:45: "The Strange One" (1957, Jack Garfield). • Dec. 19 at 9 and Dec. 23 at 3:45: "Husbands" (1970, John Cassavetes). • Dec. 20 at 6:45: "Capone" (1975, Steve Carver). • Dec. 20 at 9 and Dec. 23 at 6:30: "The Killing of a Chinese Bookie" (†). • Dec. 22 at 3:30: "Anatomy of a Murder" (1959, Otto Preminger). • Dec. 22 at 9: "Tales of Ordinary Madness" (1981, Marco Ferreri). • Dec. 23 at 9: "The Young Doctors" (1961, Phil Karlson). • "Jonas Mekas Turns 90!" Dec. 19 at 7:30: "Lost Lost Lost" (1976). • Dec. 22 at 6: "My Paris Movie" (2011). • Dec. 22 at 9:15: "Notes on an American Film Director at Work: Martin Scorsese" (2005). • Dec. 23 at 4:15: "The Brig" (1964). • Dec. 23 at 6: "As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty" (2000).

BAM CINEMATHEQUE

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Home for the Holidays." Dec. 19 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Dead" (1987, John Huston). • Dec. 20 at 4:30 and 8: "Eyes Wide Shut" (1999, Stanley Kubrick).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Dec. 21-22, Dec. 24, and Dec. 26-27 at 1, 4, and 7 and Dec. 23 and Dec. 25 at 1 and 7: "The Thief of Bagdad" (1924, Raoul Walsh; silent). • Dec. 21-27 at 10: "Django" (1966, Sergio Corbucci; in Italian). • Dec. 23 and Dec. 25 at 4: "Robin Hood" (1922, Allan Dwan; silent). • Dec. 28-29 and Dec. 31-Jan. 1 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40 and Dec. 30 at 1, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "Ninotchka" (1939, Ernst Lubitsch). •

Dec. 30 at 3:10: "Don Q, Son of Zorro" (1925, Donald Crisp; silent).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"See It in 70MM!" Dec. 21 at 6:30 and Dec. 24 at 2: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968, Stanley Kubrick). • Dec. 22 at 5:30 and Dec. 27 at 3: "Playtime" (†). • Dec. 23 at 7:45 and Dec. 25 at 3: "The Sound of Music" (1965, Robert Wise). • Dec. 25 at 7 and Dec. 26 at 3: "West Side Story" (1961, Wise and Jerome Robbins). • Dec. 29 at 5:45: "My Fair Lady" (1964, George Cukor). • Dec. 30 at 4:30 and Jan. 1 at 6:30: "Cheyenne Autumn" (†). • Dec. 31 at 3: "Ryan's Daughter" (1970, David Lean).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Nights." Dec. 21-24: "M*A*S*H" (1970, Robert Altman). • Dec. 28-31: "The Manchurian Candidate" (1962, John Frankenheimer).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niura Titus Theaters, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—The films of Pier Paolo Pasolini. Dec. 19 and Dec. 28 at 4:30: "Hawks and Sparrows" (1965-66). • Dec. 19 at 8 and Dec. 31 at 4:30: "The Gospel According to Matthew" (1964). • Dec. 20 at 4:30 and Dec. 28 at 8: "Mamma Roma" (1962). • Dec. 20 at 8: "Oedipus Rex" (1967). • Dec. 21 at 4:30: "Teorema" (1968). • Dec. 21 at 8: "Pigsy" (1969). • Dec. 22 at 5:30: "The Decameron" (1971). • Dec. 23 at 2:30: "The Canterbury Tales" (1972). • Dec. 23 at 5:30: "The Arabian Nights" (1973-74). • Dec. 26 at 4:30: "La Ricotta" (1962-63) and "La Rabbia" (1963). • Dec. 26 at 8: "Love Meetings" (1963-64). • Dec. 27 at 4:30: "Accattone" (1961). • Dec. 27 at 8: "Salò" (†). • Dec. 29 at 5: "The Earth as Seen from the Moon" (1966), "What Are the Clouds?" (1967), and "The Paper Flower Sequence" (1968). • Dec. 29 at 8: "Medea" (1969). • "Dickens on Film." Dec. 20 at 4 and Dec. 22 at 6:30: "The Mystery of

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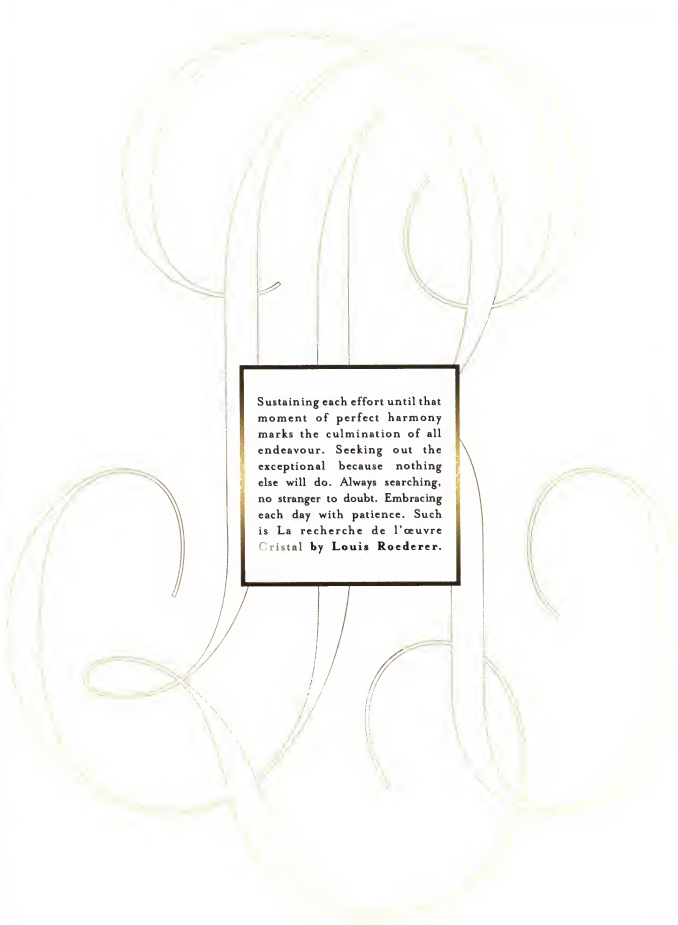
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Show us your take on our iconic dandy for a chance to be featured on newyorker.com. Contest begins December 10, 2012, at 12:01 A.M. E.T., and ends January 7, 2013, at 11:59 P.M. E.T. On January 14th, the editors will announce the twelve winners on newyorker.com. Visit newyorker.com/go/tilley2013 to see winning entries from the past five years, enter, and read complete contest rules.

No purchase necessary. Open to legal residents of the U.S., District of Columbia, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, UK, and Republic of Ireland, age 18 or older.

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

Go to newyorker.com between January 14th and January 22nd to pick your favorite Tilley from among our twelve winners. Five Readers' Choice honorees will be featured on newyorker.com in early February and will receive signed copies of "Blown Covers," by our art editor, Françoise Mouly.

Edwin Droid" (1935, Stuart Walker). ♦ Dec. 21 at 4 and Dec. 29 at 6: "Oliver Twist" (1948, David Lean). ♦ Dec. 21 at 7 and Dec. 22 at 1: "Our Mutual Friend" (1921, Åke Sandberg; silent). ♦ Dec. 22 and Dec. 28 at 3:30: "Great Expectations" (1998, Alfonso Cuarón). ♦ Dec. 22 at 8:30: "Nicholas Nickleby" (1941, Alberto Cavalcanti). ♦ Dec. 23 at 1: "Leyenda de Navidad" (1947, Manuel Tamayo, in Spanish). ♦ Dec. 23 at 3: "Non a mai Troppo Tardi" (1953, Filippo Walter Ratti, in Italian). ♦ Dec. 24 at 4 and Dec. 30 at 3: "Great Expectations" (1946, David Lean). ♦ Dec. 26 and Dec. 31 at 4: "Oliver!" (1968, Carol Reed). ♦ Dec. 26 at 7:30: "Twist" (2003, Jacob Tierney). ♦ Dec. 27 at 7: "The Pickwick Papers" (1952, Noel Langley). ♦ Dec. 29 at 1: "A Tale of Two Cities" (1935, Jack Conway). ♦ Dec. 29 at 8:30: "Oliver Twist" (2005, Roman Polanski). ♦ Dec. 30 at 12:30: "Oliver Twist" (1922, Frank Lloyd; silent). ♦ Dec. 30 at 5:15: "David Copperfield" (1935, George Cukor).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"See It Big!" Dec. 21 at 7: "All That Heaven Allows" (1955, Douglas Sirk). ♦ Dec. 22-23 at 3: "Fanny and Alexander" (1982, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Dec. 28 at 7, Dec. 29 at 3 and 6, and Dec. 30 at 3: "Bonjour Tristesse" (1958, Otto Preminger). ♦ Dec. 29-30 at 6: "La Dolce Vita" (1960, Federico Fellini; in Italian).

92Y TRIBECA

200 Hudson St. (212-601-1000)—In revival, Dec. 19 at 7: "King Lear" (1987, Jean-Luc Godard), followed by a discussion with the critics Richard Brody, of this magazine, Bilge Ebiri, of *New York* magazine, and Simon Abrams, a freelance critic for the *Village Voice* and other publications. ♦

Dec. 29 at 6: "Boogie Nights" (1997, Paul Thomas Anderson).

READINGS AND TALKS

"THAT IS ALL"

John Hodgman celebrates the publication of "That Is All," the final installment of his "Complete World Knowledge" trilogy, with two events on the night that the Mayan calendar has purportedly identified as the end of days. Hodgman will be giving a full account of the apocalypse, in the company of Cynthia Hopkins and others. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. Dec. 21 at 7 and at 10.)

NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON BENEFIT READING

The Poetry Project's thirty-ninth annual gathering features Gordon Gano, John Giorno, Steve Earle, Taylor Mead, Suzanne Vega, Lee Ranaldo, Bob Holman, Eileen Myles, and more than a hundred and forty other poets, writers, and artists. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-0910. Jan. 1, starting at 2.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"THE CLOCK—SILENT DISCO"

Clocks can be digital, analog, and even cuckoo. But most cuckoo of all is the clock that is a film. Twenty-four hours of time-telling clips from more than a thousand movies are edited in correspondence to real time in Christian Marclay's deservedly hyped installation piece for the YouTube generation, "The Clock," now making its MOMA premiere. The night before the show opens, the ordinary task of check-

ing the time becomes an occasion for a disco party. It's a counterclockwise move—parties are often about losing one's sense of time, but this one is about keeping careful track. And that's not the only twist: this is a "silent" disco party, meaning that the music, with a d.j. lineup curated by John Stanier of Battles that includes That Kid Prolific and Operator EMZ, will be broadcast to headphone-wearing guests in the museum's garden lobby, which will remain silent, creating a bizarre sight that might prove to be more mesmerizing than the installation. "The Clock" itself will be on view as it counts down to its midnight climax, ushering in the opening day of its monthlong run. (11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9680. For further information, visit moma.org. Dec. 20 at 9:30.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The final appointment of 2012 is at Sotheby's, a day devoted to Judaica and Israeli art (Dec. 19). The morning auction of ceremonial objects, paintings, and books contains a hundred and seventy lots, led by a Viennese Haggadah from the eighteenth century and four lushly rendered portraits of respected Jewish burghers by the Hungarian genre painter Isidor Kaufmann. Paintings and drawings dominate the afternoon sale, which includes a canvas by Soutine ("Jeune Homme Oblique—ment Étendu") and a set of pencil illustrations by Bruno Schulz, incisively drawn scenes of Polish Jewish life in the late nineteenth-thirties. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

GOINGS ON DIGITAL

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ON THE HORIZON



MOVIES WORLD SERIES

Jan. 3-13

With "First Look," the Museum of the Moving Image gathers new and notable films from around the world. This year's edition includes Bruno Dumont's latest work, "Outside Satan," and short films by Kleber Mendonça Filho. (718-784-0077.)

THE THEATRE WISH UPON A STAR

Jan. 25

Douglas Carter Beane wrote the book for a new version of "Cinderella," which features

the music that Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote for the 1957 television movie, plus four trunk songs, some of which have never been heard. Laura Osnes takes the title role; Santino Fontana plays the prince. Mark Brokaw directs, at the Broadway. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CODE BLUE

Jan. 27

Dozens of New York's most imaginative musicians are graduates of the Yale School of Music. The "Yale in New York" series is a more direct advance upon the city: its next

concert, at Weill Recital Hall, celebrates Mozart's birthday with music by Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, and Aaron Jay Kernis. (carnegiehall.org.)

ART OOH LA LA

Feb. 15-May 12

In 1879, Edgar Degas found a muse at a circus in Paris: an aerialist who dangled some seventy feet over the audience suspended only by a rope that she held in her teeth. The Morgan Library & Museum exhibits the painting, "Miss La La au Cirque Fernando," on loan from London's National

Gallery, alongside a related selection of studies. (212-685-0008.)

NIGHT LIFE RUMOUR HAS IT

April 8 and April 24

A retooled Fleetwood Mac, featuring Mick Fleetwood, John McVie, Lindsey Buckingham, and Stevie Nicks is reportedly working on new material. This much is certain: they'll be at Madison Square Garden at the start of April, and at the Prudential Center, in Newark, at the end of the month. (ticketmaster.com.)

"Yale in New York," at Weill Recital Hall.

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT BROTHERS' KEEPERS



Mysteries have surrounded the Muslim Brotherhood since its founding, in 1928. Nobody knows how many members there are, or how much money the organization receives, or where it all comes from. The chain of command is murky; the goals and the guiding philosophy are not clearly stated. The Egyptian revolution, which has rolled and lurched and staggered along for nearly two years, and which included Brothers among its original protesters, has failed to answer these basic questions. But the past year has solved one mystery: we now know how the Muslim Brotherhood behaves when it gets a taste of power.

The Brothers did give advance warning. The organization has never recognized the State of Israel, and it denies that Al Qaeda carried out the attacks of 9/11. In May, when Mohamed Morsi was campaigning for President as the candidate from the group's Freedom and Justice Party, he stood on a stage outside Cairo University and shouted, "I swear before God and I swear to you all, regardless of what is written in the constitution, Sharia will be applied!" A day earlier, at another Morsi rally, a speaker declared, "Yes, we do want everything! We want the parliament! We want the President! We want the cabinet and the

ministries! We want everything to be Islamic! We want the drainage systems to be Islamic!" But such messages were leavened by more moderate fare. Yasser Ali, a Party spokesman, emphasized the desire "to form a truly national coalition" with other political groups. "We feel that to be alone in the sea is not good for Egypt," he said, in March. "It would be a domestic problem, and bad for the region."

Those words proved to be prophetic. Ever since November 22nd, when President Morsi issued a declaration that granted him broad powers above the reach of any court, Egypt has become increasingly tense and politically fractured. After Morsi's declaration, a Brotherhood-dominated constituent assembly rushed to finish a draft of a new constitution. More than a quarter of the assembly members resigned in protest, and there

were clear violations of protocol, but the document was rammed through in a sixteen-hour voting session. Despite months of work, some articles were introduced only in that final session. The result is a slippery foundation for the future: a number of basic rights—including freedom of the press, due process for justice, and equality for women and minorities—aren't adequately protected.

But the most revealing moment of the crisis occurred a week and a half ago. With protesters camped outside the Presidential Palace, in Cairo, Brotherhood members led a group of men who attacked peaceful demonstrators and tore down their tents. The violence kicked off an evening of escalating counterattacks; in the end, nine people died and more than a thousand were injured, with both sides sustaining heavy casualties. Some protesters, women among them, were detained and tortured by civilian groups that included members of the Brotherhood. Morsi, in a clumsy and dishonest speech to the nation, blamed it all on "thugs" and a "fifth column" organized by the remnants of Hosni Mubarak's regime. But there was no question who had started the fighting. It was the first clearly documented case of political violence in more than fifty years of Muslim Brotherhood activity in Egypt.

Nonviolence has always been a point of pride for the organization. Some of its offshoot groups, like Hamas, have engaged in terrorism, but the Brotherhood never endorsed acts of violence in Egypt, despite decades of oppression under Mubarak that included the imprisonment



of most of its leaders. That restraint, however, like the talk of cooperation, seems to have evaporated with the first taste of power. Sometimes an organization is nonviolent on principle, and sometimes it is nonviolent simply because it finds itself in a position of weakness.

For many Egyptians, it's been a depressing month. The military seems to be aligned with Morsi, at least for the moment, and the country lacks a strong and coherent political alternative to the Brotherhood. Nevertheless, there are some reasons for optimism. The public response has been impressive, with tens of thousands of peaceful protesters surrounding the palace on many nights. These crowds are largely middle class, but they comprise people from all walks of life, including many who identify themselves as former supporters of Morsi. There are more women than usual. And expectations have changed since the beginning of the revolution. For almost two years, the media have operated with a freedom that never existed under Mubarak, and Egypt has held essentially fair elections for both parliament and the Presidency. Such progress remains fragile, but at least certain demands are being established.

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood has failed to evolve in the wake of the revolution. Traditionally, the organization's strengths have been local religious training and charity work, which have made it effective at mobilizing grassroots support for elections. But for decades it

was banned from full participation in Egypt's government, so it has never been tested in the more subtle and complicated aspects of national politics. The leadership is dominated by people from technical fields: of the eighteen members of the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau, fifteen are doctors, engineers, or scientists. Their careers may not have taught them the arts of negotiation and compromise, and Morsi, an engineer by training, has shown no real flexibility in response to the unfolding crisis. Eight of his advisers and aides have resigned in the past three weeks. From the outside, it's hard to distinguish between calculation and incompetence. On Sunday evening, the government suddenly announced major tax increases for a wide variety of goods, including gasoline, electricity, cooking oil, cigarettes, and alcohol—hardly a savvy move in a country with a ravaged economy and an ongoing political crisis. Later that night, after the decree had inspired a mad rush on Cairo liquor stores, Morsi cancelled it with a message posted on his Facebook page at 2:13 A.M.

The Brotherhood has "a huge ability to withstand negotiations that never reach anything," Gaber Gad Nassar, one of the most prominent members who quit the constituent assembly, said last week. Nassar is a professor of constitutional law at Cairo University, and his analysis could be seen as either deeply pessimistic or perversely optimistic, depending on the tone of your *insballab*.

"They are extremely keen to take over power and use it," he said. "However, the biggest problem they face is the lack of talent qualified to do that." Critics have always made this point—that the worst thing that could happen to the Brotherhood might be a rise to power, because then their weaknesses would be exposed. But this is small consolation in Cairo. The world is full of bad regimes that survive just because they hurt others more than they hurt themselves.

—Peter Hessler

THE PICTURES HIZZONER



Every weekday, Edward Irving Koch, the unshrinking, garrulous, and easily mimicked but otherwise sui-generis hundred-and-fifth mayor of New York City, rises at 6 A.M. and gets busy doing what he does best—being Ed Koch. More than two decades since leaving office, he remains confident of the consistent noteworthiness of his public utterances. Last week, he made news just by shaking off a touch of pneumonia and showing up for his eighty-eighth-birthday party, at Gracie Mansion. On a typical morning, he arrives at his desk, in Rockefeller Center, by eight-fifteen (or half an hour earlier, if he hasn't stopped at the gym along the way). Until he leaves, at four-thirty, he spends most of his time writing: miscellaneous articles, letters, e-mails, and movie reviews that he publishes online or delivers on-camera, for Shalom TV. "I like to think that I'm one of the few people in public life who write their own material. I write *every word*," he said recently. "And I really enjoy writing—especially my political commentary."

Hizzoner's weekly political commentaries, which he composes on Sundays, while he's still in bed, turn up the following day on the Huffington Post and Newsmax. Everything he publishes gets distributed to an e-mail list of six thousand recipients, and he reads and responds to everything in his in-box. His routines include a weekly television appearance on NY1 with the impeccably reputable Alfonse D'Amato and Eliot Spitzer; a



Chapman

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Viewable this February at a theatre near you—provided you reside within the gravitational pull of the Ed Koch Queensboro Bridge—will be “Koch,” a ninety-five-minute documentary directed by Neil Barsky. Three years ago, Barsky, a former *Daily News* and *Wall Street Journal* reporter turned securities analyst turned hedge-fund manager turned guy who does whatever he pleases, approached Koch's former chief of staff, Diane Coffey, with a proposal to make a film about his mayoralty, which he pitched as “a love letter to New York.” Though the two men hadn't previously met, Koch agreed to cooperate, with the stipulation that he could see the film before its release and register any complaints.

It turned out that he didn't have any. Barsky had rendered an engaging and evenhanded accounting of Koch's three terms (1978-89): his success in restoring the city's fiscal health; his appetite for argument; his evolution from reformer to ally of the clubhouse bosses; his occasionally fractious relationship with African-Americans; ditto with rightly aggrieved AIDS activists; his refusal to entertain questions about his sexuality.

Midmorning one day recently, after an appearance on a local news-and-talk show, the Mayor rode in the back of a luxury sedan to an advance screening of “Koch” on Long Island. He wore a pin-striped charcoal-gray suit, a blue-and-white checked shirt, a red-and-blue striped tie, and two hearing aids. A cane rested against the seat, and he had a pillow and a blanket for whenever it felt like nap time. He has a wispy fringe of white hair, his quota of liver spots, and a remarkable late-onset resemblance to Isaac Bashevis Singer. During a mid-journey pit stop at a McDonald's, he ordered a cup of vanilla soft-serve ice cream, then allowed Coffey to fix a handkerchief in his collar, to protect his necktie.

In the car, he talked about his successes, his successors (Dinkins: nice guy, undone by Crown Heights. Giuliani: “very able mayor” but “very mean guy.” Bloomberg: thumbs-up), the cataloguing of his archives (“enormous, just enor-

mous”), his plans to be buried in the Washington Heights section of Trinity Church Cemetery (headstone already engraved and in place, plus marble bench for visitors), and the benefits of growing old (“There are no benefits”). One early scene in “Koch” shows its subject at home, preparing his breakfast, and includes a shot of his prescription medications. “I take about ten pills every day,” Koch says. “Remember, I had a stroke and a heart attack and a quadruple bypass. Ain't bad for one guy.”

As his driver pulled up at the theatre, Koch revised his appraisal of aging. “I might make one little change,” he said. “You find out how nice people are. They hold doors and offer me seats. In the beginning, I wouldn't do it, I wouldn't sit. But now I do. After I had my bypass, I spent five weeks in intensive care. My chest filled with fluid. Ultimately, twenty-one doctors at New York-Presbyterian looked at me. When I got out, I took them all to dinner with their spouses. To Peter Luger. And I said to them, ‘If any of you order fish, I will give your name to the press.’”

—Mark Singer

R.I.P. DEPARTMENT ZOMBIE ART



When the Hudson surged through Chelsea, in late October, at least forty million dollars' worth of art was destroyed or damaged beyond repair: rendered a total loss, in insurance-company parlance. Such works—those for which the cost of conservation and the subsequent loss in market value are greater than the amount for which the works are insured—will enter into a strange netherworld. Removed from the marketplace, these objects will live on in warehouses, unseen and unappreciated, becoming what has been called “dead art” or “zombie art.”

A group of works that were damaged before Sandy are the subject of an exhibition, “No Longer Art,” which has been on display at Columbia University. The show was put together by Elka Krajewska, a Polish artist based in New York, and Mark Wasiuta, who teaches architecture at Columbia. Krajewska ex-

plained her motivation for conducting a postmortem during a panel discussion at the opening. “I assumed that when a work is destroyed it somehow disappears physically,” she told a crowd crammed into the Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery. “But when I learned that, actually, there are inventories in storage of work that for me, as an artist, would seem not to exist, that interested me and moved me, and I felt a responsibility to deal with this material.”

The deceased works were not hanging on the walls—Krajewska did not want to aestheticize their demise—but were mounted on dollies that were placed in an alcove and could be pulled out individually, like refrigerated drawers in a morgue. Among them was a Jeff Koons porcelain balloon dog that had fallen off a shelf and shattered, its severed head still in a brown padded envelope that was marked with the word “broken.” There was a Linda Bond graphite-and-gunpowder drawing of kaffiyehs that, while on display in a museum, had been smeared by the hand of a small boy. There were two perfect parts of a triptych painted by Helmut Dörner: the third part had been lost in transit. On shelves were catalogues containing correspondence by the insurance company leading up to the declaration of total loss. The names of the art works' owners had been redacted, but not the manner in which the works had been damaged. These ranged from “Something incredibly heavy, or a conveyor belt had to have done something like this” to “The box looked like it was used as an accordion.”

All the works were donated or loaned by the German-based Axa Art Insurance Corporation to the Salvage Art Institute, which was founded by Krajewska in 2010 to be, as a wall text put it, “a refuge for salvaged work while offering a platform for confronting the regulation of its financial, aesthetic and social value.” (Krajewska prefers the term “salvage art” to “dead art.”) Christiane Fischer, the president and C.E.O. of Axa Art, was a participant in the panel discussion. “Ultimately, value is a market force,” she said. But, Fischer went on, just because works were financially worthless did not mean they were without value, or might not one day have a market value restored to them. “Just imagine all the damaged works from Roman times and Greek times,” she said.



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AND GENEROUS OF
HEART. IT'S TIME TO GO
TO WORK IN A NEW ERA
OF HOPE."**

- CHRIS MATTHEWS



LEAN FORWARD



msnbc

"If they would have been thrown out, how empty would the Met be?"

After the discussion, gallerygoers circulated among the art works. One viewer thumbed through photographs of rock stars by Jim Marshall that had been damaged in transit, as if he were riffling through vinyl records at a yard sale. Another peered at a painting by the Cuban artist Miguel Florido, which had a violent slash in its center. The viewer leaned in close, as one might do to examine an artist's brushwork, although in this case it was the handiwork of what seemed to be an overenthusiastic art handler unpacking the painting. "The knife was too long," Christian Scheidemann, a conservator who appeared on the panel, explained.

Scheidemann's conservation studio, which is far enough uptown to have been spared by Sandy, is now filled with possible future accessions for the Salvage Art Institute. He is working to revive what he can, while urging collectors to stay away from the operating room. "These images of post-flood stay in your mind, and, even if the work afterwards is in total perfect condition, you have this memory of 'Oh, it must have been in the water somewhere,'" he said. "So we just tell art lovers the damage is minor, and they should probably not come to see it."

—Rebecca Mead

TRIBUTE HIT PARADE



Alert viewers of "Hitchcock," the new film about the director's struggle to remain relevant, may notice a pair of evocative but elusive music cues. Hitchcock's wife and script doctor, Alma, played by Helen Mirren, goes for a spin in a convertible with a male friend to "Tweddle Dee," a bouncy bit of fifties folderol ("Jiminy cricket, jiminy jack, / You make my heart go clickety-clack"). And when Alma discovers her friend with another woman we hear the same pure voice purring a tango: "Kiss of Fire." Could it be Rosemary Clooney? Peggy Lee?

It's actually Georgia Gibbs, a once indelible star made delible by the passing years. In the fifties, the brassy pixie with

the huge smile was "Her nibs, Miss Georgia Gibbs!"—a variety-show fixture who'd belt her hits, then smoke and banter with Frank Sinatra and Milton Berle. She was also, as it happens, the beloved step-grandmother of "Hitchcock's" director, Sacha Gervasi. "My private tribute works for the film," he said, "because she, like Alma, is the forgotten woman."

On a rainy Tuesday recently, Gervasi toured Gibbs's Manhattan from the back of a town car. Resplendent in a black top-



Georgia Gibbs

coat and a knotted wool scarf, he exuded the brio of one who, at forty-six, has checked all the boxes of the well-rounded life. He was a teen-age roadie for Anvil, and later made the documentary "Anvil! The Story of Anvil"; he worked for Ted Hughes; he was in a band with Gavin Rossdale; he interviewed Hervé Villechaize six days before the dwarf actor committed suicide; he was the voice of Jaguar cars; and he fathered an out-of-wedlock child named Bluebell with one of the Spice Girls, in this case, Ginger.

As the car nosed through traffic, Gervasi recalled flying in from London as a child to visit Gibbs and his grandfather on the Upper East Side. "She was really, really small"—five feet one—"but when she would belt out 'Arrivederci Roma,' standing in the kitchen with a chocolate milkshake in one hand and a cigarette in the other, the crystal would rattle." He said that she often spoke about a live show that she did with Danny Kaye at the Paramount Theatre, and the professionalism that was demanded: "She loved Danny,

and he gave her her big break, but if she missed her cue to laugh he'd come down on her like a ton of bricks."

Triple-parked by the Plaza Hotel, Gervasi recalled that Gibbs came here to buy back her freedom, after she'd been blacklisted for appearing in a concert to benefit Russian war orphans. "She told me she met the lawyer Edward Bennett Williams in the lobby, and that he took her envelope with five thousand dollars cash, shook her hand, stone-faced, and vanished. And that Sunday Ed Sullivan, who'd cancelled her, put her back on. That was the business, and it made her sick."

An even darker episode took place at the Gotham Hotel. "After she taped 'Your Hit Parade,' the agent invited her to discuss another show up in his room, where he raped her. Then he blackballed her from the show. That really dented her spirit, and her career. It didn't help that she refused to do what producers wanted, and pick one kind of singing. She grew up in an orphanage, she was on the road by age thirteen—she didn't take any shit from anyone." He sighed. "A lot of it is about playing the game—same as in Hollywood."

En route to Gibbs's apartment, as the rain came down harder, Gervasi said, "Even when she was dying of leukemia, in 2006, she would put on lipstick and an Hermès scarf for my arrival. I asked to film her a number of times, and she really wanted to do it, but she was worried she wouldn't be brilliant. And she didn't want to be remembered only as a sad old woman remembering the way it was."

At 965 Fifth Avenue, Gervasi ducked inside and asked the doorman, a white-haired man in blue livery named Armando, if he recollected his grandmother, in 10-C. "Oh, sure," Armando said. "Her nibs, Miss Georgia Gibbs!" His younger colleague, Elvis, chimed in: "She had the piano! She was very spunky!"

"She started on 'The Garry Moore Show,'" Armando recalled. "And she had a hit on the Lucky Strike 'Hit Parade'..."

"Tweddle Dee?" Gervasi suggested.

"That's it!" Armando began singing the tune and dancing to it, a little stiffly and shyly. Then he subsided onto his stool with a reminiscent look.

"Well," Gervasi said, smiling at a turn of events that didn't always happen for Georgia Gibbs, "I don't see how this could be more delightful."

—Tad Friend



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THE FINANCIAL PAGE IN FUNDS WE TRUST?

One of the most influential ideas in Washington these days is that Social Security and Medicare are on the verge of going bust. Earlier this month, Senator Lindsey Graham warned of the "imminent bankruptcy" of these insurance programs for the elderly, and Republican leaders are citing the threat of insolvency as a reason that entitlement reform must be part of any fiscal-cliff deal. The argument sounds reasonable enough, but it's really a bid to turn the great political strength of these programs—the fact that they were designed to be self-supporting—into a weakness.

Unlike most government programs, Social Security and, in part, Medicare are funded by payroll taxes dedicated specifically to them. Some of the tax revenue pays for current benefits; anything that's left over goes into trust funds for the future. The programs were designed this way for political reasons. When F.D.R. introduced Social Security, he calculated that funding it through a payroll tax rather than out of general tax revenue would make people think of the program not as welfare but as an entitlement—as something that they had paid for and had a right to. Many liberals initially opposed the idea, because payroll tax rates aren't progressive (everyone pays the same rate) and because they tax only labor income. But the system proved as resilient as F.D.R. had predicted, and when Lyndon Johnson introduced Medicare, in the nineteen-sixties, he adopted it, too. Over the years, Social Security and Medicare taxes have risen sharply, to the point where payroll taxes account for thirty-six per cent of all federal revenue. Today, most American households pay more in payroll taxes than in income tax. Yet there's little public hostility to these taxes, and the programs they fund remain enormously popular.

But the trust-fund strategy has an Achilles' heel: funds can run out of money. Projections show that, owing to an aging population and rising health-care costs, the Medicare Trust Fund will become insolvent in 2024 and Social Security in 2033. The image of empty coffers is a

powerful one: half of all Americans aged between eighteen and twenty-nine don't think that Social Security will exist when they retire. That's a bizarre thing to believe about an important government program. No one ever says, "I don't think the U.S. Army will be there when I get old" or talks about the Defense Department "going broke." We assume that there will be always be a need for the military, and that we'll end up paying the taxes that are necessary to fund it. But, because Social Security and Medicare have always been self-supporting, it's easy to believe that they'll just vanish if the trust funds dry up. This isn't the case. Relatively minor tweaks to Social Security will allow it to keep paying full benefits for many de-



cedes. And, if we wanted, we could supplement funding for both programs with general government revenue. That's what most European countries do, and, indeed, parts of Medicare are already paid for out of general revenue. The only way that Social Security and Medicare can go "bankrupt" is if we let them.

So why are politicians obsessed with the question of solvency? Because it makes cutting entitlements seem inevitable, rather than a political choice. After all, if you're in favor of cutting entitlements, that means you're in favor of spending less money taking care of old people. That's a tenable position, but it's politically dicey—particularly for Republicans, since the elderly are among their biggest supporters. It's far more palatable to argue that we

simply have to cut benefits, because otherwise the programs will go bankrupt. That's why when, in 2011, Paul Ryan introduced a plan to effectively replace Medicare with a voucher system he said that he was doing so in order to preserve Medicare for future generations. Hand-wringing about Medicare and Social Security going bust allows Republicans, paradoxically, to portray themselves not as opponents of entitlement spending but, rather, as its saviors.

This isn't just a rhetorical problem. It leads to terrible policy. You can see that in the current debate over the proposal to raise the age of Medicare eligibility from sixty-five to sixty-seven, a proposal that, some have suggested, President Obama may agree to as part of a fiscal-cliff deal. This is not a good idea: though it would save taxpayers close to six billion dollars a year, it would raise over-all health-care spending by more than eleven billion dollars a year, according to an estimate by the Kaiser Family Foundation. (That's because Medicare is better at holding down costs than private insurance, and because the out-of-pocket costs for ineligible seniors would rise.) Sure, it would extend the life of Medicare, but that's meaningless on its own: you could extend the life of Medicare indefinitely if you restricted it to people over eighty-five, but that doesn't mean it's smart to do so. Only an obsession with the trust fund makes kicking people off Medicare seem like a rational approach to our health-care problems.

There are legitimate reasons to be worried about entitlement spending. But the fundamental question is not how much longer the Social Security and Medicare trust funds are going to be solvent. The question is how much we're willing to spend to insure that the elderly have affordable access to health care and some financial security. The political virtue of the trust-fund strategy has been to make it seem as if Social Security and Medicare run on autopilot. But it has also meant that we've never had an honest debate about the value, and the cost, of social insurance. That's the argument that politicians should be having, instead of a disingenuous one about solvency.

—James Surowiecki

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RECALL OF THE WILD

The quest to engineer a world before humans.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT



Flevoland, which sits more or less in the center of the Netherlands, half an hour from Amsterdam, is the country's newest province, a status that is partly administrative and partly existential. For most of the past several millennia, Flevoland lay at the bottom of an inlet of the North Sea. In the nineteen-thir-

has the head of a lion and the tail of a mermaid.

Flevoland has some of Europe's richest farmland; its long, narrow fields are planted with potatoes and sugar beets and barley. On each side of the province is a city that has been built from scratch: Almere in the west and Lelystad in the

for industry; however, while it was still in the process of drying out, a handful of biologists convinced the Dutch government that they had a better idea. The newest land in Europe could be used to create a Paleolithic landscape. The biologists set about stocking the Oostvaardersplassen with the sorts of animals that



The Dutch government used land reclaimed from the sea to create a fifteen-thousand-acre park that mimics a Paleolithic ecosystem.

ties, a massive network of dams transformed the inlet into a freshwater lake, and in the nineteen-fifties a drainage project, which was very nearly as massive, allowed Flevoland to emerge out of the muck of the former seafloor. The province's coat of arms, drawn up when it was incorporated, in the nineteen-eighties, features a beast that

east. In between lies a wilderness that was also constructed, Genesis-like, from the mud.

Known as the Oostvaardersplassen, a name that is pretty much unpronounceable for English-speakers, the reserve occupies fifteen thousand almost perfectly flat acres on the shore of the inlet-turned-lake. This area was originally designated

would have inhabited the region in prehistoric times—had it not at that point been underwater. In many cases, the animals had been exterminated, so they had to settle for the next best thing. For example, in place of the aurochs, a large and now extinct bovine, they brought in Heck cattle, a variety specially bred by Nazi scientists. (More on the Nazis

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later.) The cattle grazed and multiplied. So did the red deer, which were trucked in from Scotland, and the horses, which were imported from Poland, and the foxes and the geese and the egrets. In fact, the large mammals reproduced so prolifically that they formed what could, with a certain amount of squinting, be said to resemble the great migratory herds of Africa; the German magazine *Der Spiegel* has called the Oostvaardersplassen "the Serengeti behind the dikes." Visitors now pay up to forty-five dollars each to take safari-like tours of the park. These are especially popular in the fall, during rutting season.

Such is the success of the Dutch experiment—whatever, exactly, it is—that it has inspired a new movement. Dubbed Rewilding Europe, the movement takes the old notion of wilderness and turns it inside out. Perhaps it's true that genuine wildernesses can only be destroyed, but new "wilderness," what the Dutch call "new nature," can be created. Every year, tens of thousands of acres of economically marginal farmland in Europe are taken out of production. Why not use this land to produce "new nature" to replace what's been lost? The same basic idea could, of course, be applied outside of Europe—it's been proposed, for example, that depopulated expanses of the American Midwest are also candidates for rewilding.

I visited the Oostvaardersplassen during a stretch of very blue days in early fall. As it happened, two film crews, one Dutch and the other French, were also there. The French crew, whose credits include the international hit "Winged Migration," was scouting the reserve for possible use in an upcoming feature about the history of Europe as seen through the eyes of other species. The Dutch crew was finishing up a full-length nature documentary. One afternoon, we all got into vans and drove to the middle of the park. A stiff breeze was blowing, as it almost always does near the North Sea. We passed a marshy area covered in reeds, which nodded in the wind. Ducks bobbed in a pond. Farther on, where the land grew drier, the reeds gave way to grass. We passed a herd of red deer and some aurochs wannabes, and the carcass of a deer, which had been picked almost clean by foxes and ravens. (The Dutch crew had filmed the scav-

enging with a time-lapse camera.) Eventually, we came to a herd of about a thousand wild—or, at least, feral—horses. They whinnied and cantered and shook their heads. The horses were an almost uniform buff color, and the breeze lifted their manes, which were dark brown. We all piled out of the vans. The horses seemed not to notice us, though we were just a few yards away.

"Ah, c'est joli ça!" the French exclaimed. A flock of black-and-white barnacle geese rose into the air and then, a moment later, a yellow train clicked by, carrying passengers from Almere to Lelystad or, perhaps, vice versa. A few members of the French crew had brought along video cameras. As they panned across the horses—at the edge of the herd, a mare nuzzled a foal that couldn't have been more than two or three days old—I wondered what they would do with the high-voltage power lines in the background. It occurred to me that, like so many post-modern projects, the Oostvaardersplassen was faintly ridiculous. It was also, I had to admit, inspiring.

If one person could be said to be responsible for the Oostvaardersplassen, it is an ecologist named Frans Vera. Vera, who is sixty-three, has gray hair, a gray beard, and a cheerfully combative manner. He spent most of his adult life working for one or another branch of the Dutch government and now works for a private foundation, of which, as far as I could tell, he is the sole employee. Vera picked me up one day at my hotel in Lelystad, and we drove over to the reserve's administrative offices, where we had a cup of coffee in a room decorated with the mounted head of a very large black Heck bull.

Vera explained that he first became interested in the Oostvaardersplassen in the late nineteen-seventies. At that point, he had just graduated from university, in Amsterdam, and was unemployed. He read an article about some Greylag geese that had appeared in the reclaimed area, which was then a boggy no man's land. The geese kept the vegetation low by chomping on it, and in this way maintained their marshy habitat. Vera was an avid bird-watcher, and the story intrigued him. He wrote his own article, arguing that the place ought to be turned into a nature preserve. Soon afterward, he got

a job with the Dutch forestry agency.

In the late seventies, the prevailing view in the Netherlands was—and, to a certain extent, it still is—that nature was something to be managed, like a farm. According to this view, a preserve needed to be planted, pruned, and mowed, and the bigger the preserve, the more intervention was required. Vera chafed at this notion. The problem, he decided, was that Europe's large grazers had been hunted to oblivion. If they could be restored, then nature could take care of itself. This theory, coming from a very junior civil servant, was not particularly popular.

"Mostly there's no trouble as long as you are within the borders of an accepted paradigm," Vera told me. "But be aware when you start to discuss the paradigm. Then it starts to be only twenty-five per cent discussion of facts and seventy-five per cent psychology. The thing I most often heard was, 'Who do you think you are?'" Undaunted, Vera kept pushing. He had a few allies at various government ministries, and one of them arranged for him to get the money to buy some Heck cattle. In 1983, while the future of the Oostvaardersplassen was still being debated, Vera acquired the cows from Germany, although he had not yet secured permission from the governing authorities to release them.

"I bought them and I was standing here with the trucks," he recalled happily. "And they were so angry!" This first group of Heck cattle was not allowed onto the site, but a second group, acquired some months later, was let in. The following year, Vera bought forty Konik horses from Poland. Koniks are believed to be descended from tarpans, one of the world's last subspecies of truly wild horse, which survived in Eastern Europe into the nineteenth century. (Practically all the horses that are called "wild" today are, in fact, the offspring of domesticated horses that were, at some point or another, let loose.) Red deer, which are closely related to what Americans call elk, were brought in during the nineteen-nineties.

Meanwhile, other animals were finding their way to the Oostvaardersplassen on their own. Foxes arrived, as did muskrats, which in Europe count as an invasive species. Buzzards and goshawks and gray herons and kingfishers and kestrels turned up. A pair of very large white-tailed eagles swooped in and built their

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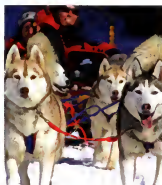
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Top: Enjoy Winterlude in Ottawa, Canada's capital, February 3-18, 2013; Left: CN Tower Edgewalk, Toronto; Winterdance Dogsled Tours, Haliburton.



The Group of Seven and contemporaries in one of the Canadian Art galleries at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa.

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Canadian Tulip Festival in Ottawa, May 3-12, 2013.

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nest in an improbably small tree. In 2005, a rare black vulture appeared, but after a few months in residence it wandered onto the railroad tracks, where it was hit by a train. (The rail line runs along the southern edge of the preserve.) Vera's dream is that one day the Oostvaardersplassen will be connected to other nature reserves in the Netherlands—a plan that has been partly but never fully funded—and that this will, in turn, allow it to attract wolves. Wolves were extirpated from most of Western Europe more than a century ago, but, owing to stringent protections put in place over the past few decades, they have recently been making a comeback in countries like Germany and France. (Two packs, with about ten wolves each, now live within forty miles of Berlin.) Last year, a wolf believed to be the first seen in Holland since the eighteen-sixties was spotted about seventy miles southeast of the Oostvaardersplassen, in the town of Duiven.

"That is probably unimaginable for people in the United States—having wolves in the Netherlands," Vera said. "But it is the future."

After we had finished our coffee, we got into a truck and drove through the gates of the preserve. So effectively have the cows and the horses and the deer kept the place grazed that there was barely a bush to be seen—just acre after very flat acre of clipped grass, like a bowling green. We passed a few groups of deer and a fox that looked back at us with pale, glittering eyes. Vera stopped the truck at a look-out built on stilts. We climbed up a narrow ladder. "This is a window that shows us how the Netherlands looked thousands of years ago," he said, gesturing at the grassland below.

A corollary of Vera's theory about large grazers is a second hypothesis, which he has pushed even more vigorously than the first, if that's possible. Among ecologists, the prevailing view of Europe in its natural, which is to say pre-agrarian, state is that it was heavily forested. (The continent's last stands of old-growth forest are found on the border of Poland and Belarus, in the Białowieża Forest, which the author Alan Weisman has described as a "relic of what once stretched east to Siberia and west to Ireland.") Vera argues that, even before Europeans figured out how to

farm, the continent was more of a parklike landscape, with large expanses of open meadow. It was kept this way, he maintains, by large herds of herbivores—auerochs, red deer, tarpans, and European bison. (The bison, also known as wisents, were hunted nearly to extinction by the late eighteen-hundreds.)

Vera has written up his argument in a dense, five-hundred-page treatise that has received a good deal of attention from European naturalists, not all of it favorable. A botany professor at Dublin's Trinity College, Fraser Mitchell, has written that an analysis of ancient pollen "forces the rejection of Vera's hypothesis." Vera, for his part, rejects the rejection, arguing that, precisely because they ate so much grass, the auerochs and the wisents skewed the pollen record. "That is a scientific debate that is still going on," he told me.

Like the rest of Flevoland, the Oostvaardersplassen lies about fifteen feet below sea level and is protected from flooding by a series of thick earthen dikes. As a result, when you are standing in the park, the lake, known as the Markermeer, is above you, which produces the vertiginous sense of a world upside down. In the lovely weather, the Markermeer was filled with sailboats; these seemed to be hovering above the horizon, like zeppelins.

"What we see here is that, instead of what many nature conservationists think—that something that is lost is lost forever—you can have the conditions to have it redeveloped," Vera told me. "So this is the ultimate proof. There's no bird here who says, 'I won't breed here, because it's unnatural—it's four and a half metres below sea level, and I never did that.'" We drove on, and stopped to take a look at the nest built by the white-tailed eagles, another animal that only very narrowly avoided extinction. The eagles showed up in the Oostvaardersplassen in 2006, and became the first pair to breed in the Netherlands since the Middle Ages. Their nest—empty at the time of my visit—was an extraordinary structure, made out of sticks and nearly the size of an armchair. It seemed ready to topple the scrawny tree it was perched in.

Vera was particularly pleased with the eagles, because several ornithologists had told him the birds would nest only in very tall, mature trees, of which the Oostvaardersplassen has none.

"Many so-called specialists thought this would be impossible," he said. "The eagles had a different opinion."

Access to the Oostvaardersplassen by humans is strictly controlled, and that morning neither of the film crews was there and no tours were out, so Vera and the animals and I pretty much had the place to ourselves. The quiet was interrupted only by the squawking of the geese and the clatter of an occasional train. We continued west, skirting a herd of red deer. A dead horse was lying in the middle of the herd. Its chest was bloated, and there was a large dark hole where its anus once had been. Vera speculated that it had been made by foxes trying to get at the horse's entrails.

Like genuinely wild animals, those in the Oostvaardersplassen are expected to fend for themselves. They are not fed or bred or vaccinated. Also like wild animals, they often die for lack of resources; for the large herbivores in the reserve, the mortality rate can approach forty per cent a year. From a public-relations point of view, this is far and away the most controversial aspect of Vera's scheme. When the weather is harsh, there's widespread starvation in the preserve, which provides gruesome images for Dutch TV.

Often the dying animals are shown huddled up against the fences of the Oostvaardersplassen, a scene that invariably leads to comparisons with the Holocaust.

"You can't have a discussion without the Second World War coming up," Vera told me. "It's really sick-making." In the fall of 2005, the controversy became so heated that the Dutch government appointed a committee—the International Committee on the Management of Large Herbivores in the Oostvaardersplassen, or ICMLH—to look into the matter. ICMLH recommended a policy of "reactive culling," under which the animals would be monitored over the winter, and those which



seemed too weak to survive until spring would be shot.

Michael Coughenour, a research scientist at the Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory at Colorado State University, was a member of ICMO. He told me that while it was difficult to compare mortality rates at the Oostvaardersplassen to those in a place like the Serengeti, "severe-winter die-offs are a natural thing."

"I didn't see anything that looked bad to me," he went on, referring to a visit the committee members made to the Oostvaardersplassen. "I think it's a great experiment to let it run and see what happens."

Even though ICMO's recommendations were adopted, many critics were not satisfied, and in 2006 a Dutch animal-welfare association sued the managers of the Oostvaardersplassen for what it alleged was continuing mistreatment. The group lost the case, appealed, and lost again. Then, in the winter of 2010, an unusually cold one in northern Europe, a Dutch news program aired a segment on the Oostvaardersplassen that showed an emaciated deer stumbling into a half-frozen pond and drowning. A public outcry ensued, prompting an "emergency" debate in parliament.

"It's an illusion to think we can go back to primordial times, dressed in bear furs and floating around in hollowed-out trees," the M.P. who led the debate, Henk Jan Ormel, said. "The world of today looks very different, and we shouldn't make the animals of the Oostvaardersplassen bear the burden of this."

"It became political," Sip van Wieren, a professor of ecology at Wageningen University, told me. "Very political." A second ICMO was convened. This one recommended a policy of "early reactive culling," under which the animals that were deemed unlikely to survive the winter would be shot in the fall. How exactly the rangers at the Oostvaardersplassen were supposed to figure out in November which animals would be starving by February was left rather vague.

When I visited, in September, the number of grazers in the park was at its annual peak, with more than three thousand deer, a thousand horses, and three hundred Heck cattle. Eventually, it is hoped, birth rates in the Oostvaardersplassen will decline, and the population will reach some kind of equilibrium, but in

the meantime the shooting continues. Vera and I came upon a group of cows sunning themselves near a dead tree. They regarded us warily, through glassy black eyes. The adults looked fearfully robust, but some of the calves seemed a bit shaky; within a few months, I figured, they'd probably be carcasses. Vera told me that he viewed "early reactive culling" as an arrangement whose only real beneficiaries were humans; as far as the ungulates were concerned, he thought, starving to death was a very peaceful way to go.

"It only has to do with the acceptance of people," he said, "and nothing, in my mind, to do with the suffering of animals."

There are more than 1.5 billion cows in the world today, and all of them are believed to be descended from the aurochs—*Bos primigenius*—which once ranged across Europe, much of Asia, and parts of the Middle East. Aurochs were considerably more impressive beasts than domesticated cattle. Julius Caesar described them as being just "a little below the elephant in size," with "strength and speed" that was "extraordinary." (It is unlikely that he ever actually saw one.) More recent estimates suggest that males were nearly six feet high at the withers and females five feet. By Roman times, humans had so diminished the aurochs' numbers that the animals were missing from most of their former habitat.

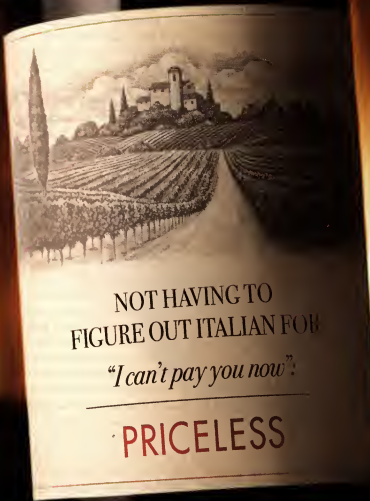
By the fifteen-hundreds, the only place they could still be found in the wild was in the Polish Royal Forests, west of Warsaw. The animals there were understood to be extremely rare, and special gamekeepers were hired to protect them. But their numbers continued to dwindle. In 1557, some fifty aurochs were counted. Forty years later, only half that many remained, and by 1620 only one aurochs—a female—was left. She died in 1627. The aurochs thus earned, as the Dutch writer Cis Van Vuure has put it, "the dubious honor of being the first documented case of extinction." (The next case was the dodo, four decades later.)

The aurochs was essentially forgotten until the early twentieth century, when a spate of scientific papers on the animal appeared. In the nineteen-twenties, two German brothers, Heinz and Lutz Heck, both zoo directors, decided to try to breed

back the aurochs, using the genetic material that had been preserved in domesticated cattle. This was, of course, long before DNA testing—or even the discovery of DNA. To guide their efforts, the brothers mainly relied on old pictures of aurochs, many of them drawn by people with no firsthand knowledge of the animal. The brothers chose different kinds of cows for their breeding efforts: Heinz, who directed the zoo in Munich, crossed, among other breeds, Scottish Highland cattle and German Anglers, while Lutz, the director of the Berlin Zoo, mixed Spanish fighting cattle with Corsican and Camargue cattle. Nevertheless, the two claimed that their efforts had produced similar results, which, they argued, proved that "the fundamental principle of breeding back was correct." Even though he continued to crossbreed his crossbreeds, Heinz decided that the project had been successfully completed. "The wild bull, the aurochs, lives again," he wrote.

Not long afterward, the project became tangled up in German politics. In 1938, Lutz, a committed Nazi, was appointed to the Third Reich's Forest Authority. His idea of breeding back the aurochs dovetailed neatly with the Nazis' scheme of restoring Europe, through selective human breeding, to its mythic, Aryan past. Lutz sent some of his "aurochs" to the Rominten Heath, in East Prussia—now Poland—where Hermann Göring had his favorite hunting lodge. Other Heck-bred cows were installed on the grounds of Göring's estate north of Berlin. Most—perhaps all—of these animals were killed toward the end of the Second World War. (According to Clemens Driessen, a Dutch academic who has studied the Heck brothers, Göring personally shot some of the cattle on his estate as the Soviets bore down on Berlin.) But some Heck cattle at the Munich zoo and in parks in Augsburg, Münster, and Duisburg survived.

Over the years, even as Heck cattle have been raised, uneventfully, in once Nazi-occupied nations like the Netherlands—it's the descendants of the Munich-bred cows that now graze the Oostvaardersplassen—they've never managed to shake their Fascist associations. Many regard them as a sort of veterinary version of the "Hitler Dicks"—half horror, half joke. Not long ago, when a British farmer imported some



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Heck cattle from Belgium, the story made national news.

"NAZI 'SUPER-COWS' SHIPPED TO DEVON FARM," the *Guardian* reported. "THE HERD REICH," ran the headline in the *Sum*.

As more aurochs remains have been unearthed and more sophisticated research has been done on them, it's become clear that the Heck brothers' creation is a far cry from the original—Heck cattle are too small, their horns have the wrong shape, and the proportions of their bodies are off. All of which has led to a new, de-Nazified effort to back-breed the aurochs. This project is based in the Dutch city of Nijmegen, about fifty miles southeast of Amsterdam, and is entirely independent of the Oostvaardersplassen. Still, it reflects much the same can-do, "what is lost is not lost forever" approach to conservation. So while I was in the Netherlands I decided to go for a visit.

"Watch out," Henri Kerkdijk warned. It was another surprisingly blue day, and we were tromping through a weedy field toward a line of trees. I looked back at him, which turned out to be a mistake, because at that moment I stepped into a large pile of cow shit. As I scraped it from my shoes, I wondered how much bigger the pile would have been had it been produced by an actual aurochs.

Standing in the shade of the trees were about a dozen cows of varying color and size. Kerkdijk pointed to two black bulls bent over a patch of grass. The first was called Manolo Uno. He was two years old and not yet fully grown, but already he measured almost five feet at the withers. He had a grayish muzzle, a light stripe down his back, and forward-tilting horns that reminded me of Ferdinand's. I have no idea how closely he resembled an actual aurochs; certainly, though, he seemed a very imposing beast, larger and more menacing-looking than the Heck cattle at the Oostvaardersplassen. The second bull, Rocky, was a year younger than Manolo but almost as big. This Kerkdijk took as a particularly promising sign. "That one's going to be really tall," he said.

Four years ago, Kerkdijk teamed up with an environmental consultant named Ronald Goderie to start the TaurOs program, the stated goal of which is to give

"the rebuilding of the aurochs a serious try." (In a recent write-up of the effort, the two men dismiss Heck cattle as "considered by experts to be a failure.") At the point that I met with them, the project had generated nearly a hundred calves, of which Manolo Uno and Rocky had been deemed the most aurochs-like. To create the calves, Kerkdijk and Goderie had crossed several so-called primitive cattle breeds—varieties developed hundreds, even thousands, of years ago, and therefore more likely to retain aurochs-like features. Manolo, for example, represents a cross between an Italian breed known as Maremmana primitivo and a Spanish breed known as Pajuna. At two, he was old enough to be crossbred himself. But he had refused to part with any of his semen for the purpose of artificial insemination, a demurral that Kerkdijk took as evidence of his virility and a further positive sign.

Ninety years after the Heck brothers' attempt, the basic idea behind back-breeding remains pretty much the same. If different breeds of primitive cattle preserve different stretches of the aurochs's genetic material, then reassembling those stretches should produce something close to—though not exactly like—the original. (Kerkdijk and Goderie have decided that their new animal should be called not an aurochs but a "tauros.") Scientists in England and Ireland have succeeded in sequencing a small subset of the aurochs's DNA—its mitochondrial DNA—using a seven-thousand-year-old bone that was found in a cave in Derbyshire. Other scientists have been approached about sequencing the entire genome. When—or, really, if—this work is completed, it should be possible to gauge how close a calf comes to an authentic aurochs by analyzing a blood sample or a bit of saliva.

According to the timetable Kerkdijk and Goderie have drawn up, herds of "tauroses" should be ready by around 2025. By that point, the two expect that large tracts of Europe will have been rewilded, and the animals will be allowed to roam across them. How the intervening years' worth of breeding and cross-breeding and genetic evaluation will be funded remains a bit murky. Currently, the project is supported in part by renting cows to nature parks and in part by butchering them. The meat is marketed as "wild beef," and it commands a pre-

mium in Amsterdam, where it is available only to customers who sign up for delivery in advance. Kerkdijk said that "wild beef" sales had risen dramatically over the last year or so, owing to interest in the tauros. I asked if I could try some.

"Did you bring your bow and arrow?" Goderie asked.

Like so much in Europe today, the term "rewilding" is an American import. It was coined in the nineteen-nineties, and first proposed as a conservation strategy by two biologists, Michael Soulé, now a professor emeritus at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and Reed Noss, a research professor at the University of Central Florida. According to Soulé and Noss, the problem with most conservation plans was that they aimed to protect what exists. Yet what exists is often just a shadow of what once was. In most of the United States, large predators like wolves and cougars have been wiped out. Without top predators, the two argued, ecosystems no longer really function as systems.

"A cynic might describe rewilding as an atavistic obsession," they wrote. "A more sympathetic critic might label it romantic. We contend, however, that rewilding is simply scientific realism." According to Soulé and Noss, rewilding demanded, in addition to predators, the establishment of large, strictly protected "core" reserves, and migratory corridors linking one to the next. They summarized their formula as "the three C's: cores, corridors, and carnivores." These ideas are now considered mainstream by conservation biologists, even those who would not necessarily describe themselves as proponents of rewilding.

In 2005, a dozen biologists took the concept of rewilding one step further. In an article published in the journal *Nature*, the group presented a plan for what it called "Pleistocene rewilding."

When humans arrived in North America, some thirteen thousand years ago, toward the end of the last ice age, they killed off most of the continent's largest mammals, leaving key ecological roles unfilled. The Pleistocene rewilders proposed finding substitute animals that could serve in their place. For instance, African or Asian elephants could be let loose to make up for the long-lost woolly mammoth. Similarly, Bactrian camels,



BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE URBAN FUTURE

CHALLENGE:

As urban populations surge in the coming decades, how is Asia preparing for the needs of hundreds of millions of new residents?

By Stella Danker

Humanity is fast becoming an urban species. In 1970, New York and Tokyo were the only urban regions in the world with more than 10 million people. Today, there are nearly 23 of these so-called mega-cities, and by 2025, there will be 37—more than half of them in Asia. The Asian continent will not only house half of the world's urban population, it will boast four of its largest cities: Tokyo, New Delhi and Mumbai in India; and Shanghai on China's western coast.

In order to prepare for this unprecedented urban boom, cities in Asia—and across the globe—must find workable solutions for the creation of everything from new housing, office, and factory space to greatly expanded networks for transportation, water, refuse disposal, energy production, and much more.

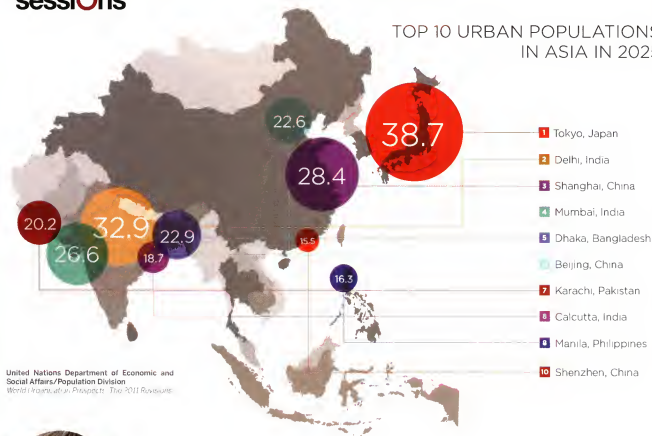
This installment of Singapore Sessions brings together four executives representing key pillars in the development of livable urban environments: from the field of economics, **Rachel Kyte**, Vice President for Sustainable Development at the World Bank; in infrastructure planning, **Paul Brown**,

Executive Vice President of CDM Smith, in technology, **Dr. Roland Busch**, CEO Infrastructure and Cities Sector, Siemens AG; and in city planning and architecture, **Dr. Liu Thai-Ker**, Chairman of the Center for Livable Cities, Singapore.

Each brings a world of expertise to the challenges and efficiencies prompted by the remarkable growth of cities across the globe, presenting their visions for how cities can prosper and thrive during this transformational century and well into the future.

All share the belief that how Asian governments manage urbanization is crucial to the health and well being of billions of people. The lessons learned during this period of rapid urban expansion have the potential to dramatically improve energy management and infrastructure outcomes all over the globe.

The panelists address the scale of the task in providing shelter and other basic necessities, as well as the work of persuading government, business, and academia to work together to build economically prosperous and sustainable cities that will continue to generate wealth while enriching the lives of their residents.

TOP 10 URBAN POPULATIONS
IN ASIA IN 2025

United Nations Department of Economic and
Social Affairs/Population Division
World Population Prospects: The 2011 Revision



UNDERSTANDING URBAN GROWTH

Rachel Kyte, Vice President for Sustainable Development, World Bank

Based in Washington, D.C., Rachel Kyte is in charge of the World Bank's global development efforts in everything from agriculture and the environment to energy, transportation, urban infrastructure, and social development.

"The battle of climate change is going to be won or lost in Asia's cities," says Rachel Kyte, the World Bank's Vice President for Sustainable Development. The explosive rate of urban growth in Asia and the means by which cities power and sustain themselves will have a tremendous impact on pollution levels all over the globe.

Cities are powerhouses of economic production. They consume two-thirds of the world's energy and produce 80% of its greenhouse gas. As sea levels and ocean temperatures rise, cities will also be where the effects of climate change are most keenly felt. "Whether it's flooding in Beijing, cyclones in the Philippines, or hurricanes striking New York—the dangers posed by climate change are shared equally."

The scale of these challenges grows along with the population. "China's cities alone are absorbing 13 million new people each year," says Kyte, adding that India and China will see their urban populations double and triple respectively in the coming decades. "The numbers for Asia are astounding," she says, adding that to keep cities livable, accommodating new residents in a sustainable way is absolutely essential.

Planning for high density, Kyte says, is key. "It is much more expensive to build a city and retrofit it than it is to actually plan for growth from the start." She notes the tremendous problems Jakarta, Indonesia, is experiencing attempting to reconfigure its sanitation system to keep up with explosive rates of growth. Density is also a key consideration in planning transportation systems that assist the poor in getting to areas where workers are most needed.

"In the last 20 years, we've raised 600 million people out of poverty because of sustained economic growth. But 1.3 billion still have no access to electricity, 2.6 billion have no access to proper sanitation, and 900 million have no access to clean drinking water. Growth has to be greener and more inclusive."

Studies show that cities are going to triple their investment in urban infrastructure from \$10 trillion now to \$30 trillion in 2025. For cities to find the resources, they will have to be attractive propositions for investors. "The dialogue between city governments and the private sector is abso-

"The battle of climate change is going to be won or lost in Asia's cities."

lutely essential in order to make sure that planners have access to the best and the latest thinking about city design."

Apart from the multiple benefits that come from a free exchange of ideas, public-private collaborations are essential to the creation of consensus around sustainable development goals, says Kyte. "The city of the future should be cost-effective and environmentally sound; it should efficiently create jobs and provide basic services to the poor and to others," she says. "You need to have regulatory, legal, and policy frameworks in place to allow the private sector to invest, which will help spur growth and reduce poverty."



BUILDING GREENER CITIES

Paul Brown, Executive Vice President, CDM Smith

Based in San Diego, CA, Paul Brown has over 35 years experience in the planning and management of public utilities and environmental facilities. He is a member of CDM Smith's executive leadership team and the founding technical director of CDM Smith's Neysadurai Centre for Integrated Urban Solutions in Singapore.

Building more sustainable urban environments will transform the appearance of cities—greening them inside and out, says Paul Brown, Executive Vice President of CDM Smith. "When we use the term 'green growth,' we often talk about incorporating natural systems to work for us," he says.

One example of "green growth" solutions being implemented across the globe is the creation of new parks linked to the city's water infrastructure. The parks double as flood catchments, supplanting the work of concrete drains. The rainwater can then be collected and purified, helping to close the loop on the urban water cycle.

"Instead of taking this precious resource, using it once, and throwing it away, many cities are employing innovative treatment technologies, on all scales, to recycle that water," says Brown.

CDM Smith has been working with Singapore's national water agency, PUB, since the mid-1970s. The company served as project consultant for the iconic Marina Barrage, which is a groundbreaking multipurpose addition to the city's water infrastructure, providing water supply, flood control, and recreational space at the inlet to Marina Bay.

The CDM Smith Neysadurai Centre, in the meantime, works on smaller-scale green solutions like rooftop gardens, rainwater harvesting, and renewable energy for Singapore's Housing and Development Board

(HDB)—an agency that provides affordable housing for 82 percent of Singapore's 5.3 million residents.

At the Neysadurai Centre, architects and engineers test innovative new solutions for water, waste management, transportation, energy, building technologies, and urban ecology. "We want to provide the tools and the processes that will allow us to produce high-efficiency infrastructure solutions that save

"We can radically improve our performance with respect to all our infrastructure and do a great deal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

money, minimize greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce waste—helping planners, architects, and engineers design tomorrow's cities."

"The form of the city—and the ways in which it uses land, water resources, and energy—has a great deal to do with its share of CO₂ emissions. It is my belief that we can radically improve our performance with respect to infrastructure and do a great deal to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that come from urbanization," says Brown.

He adds, "One of the major differences between the West and Asia is the unprecedented speed at which growth is occurring. The pace in Asia is much greater, and thus, so is the scale of the infrastructure investment needed to keep up with it."



TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

Dr. Roland Busch, CEO of Infrastructure and Cities Sector, Siemens AG

Dr. Roland Busch joined Siemens in 1994 and has been a member of the managing board, as well as CEO of Infrastructure and Cities Sector, since 2011. The Asia-Pacific is his special area of responsibility.

Recognizing the paramount importance of building sustainable cities, Siemens last year set up a new business sector—Infrastructure & Cities—that offers integrated green technology solutions for use by municipal and state governments and the businesses they contract with.

Dr. Roland Busch, Siemens Infrastructure and Cities Sector CEO, specializes in helping to meet the unprecedented demands being placed on urban environments in the Asia-Pacific region. He cites models from the Asian Development Bank, which predicts that the pace of rural-to-urban migration will require the continent-wide construction of 20,000 new units of housing, 250 kilometers of new roads, and waterworks to handle 16 million additional liters of potable water every day over the next decade.

The material and resource strain of this expansion requires that development be coordinated and sustainable, says Dr. Busch. Cities must optimize everything they consume, insisting on zero-emission transport fleets, intelligent efficiency controls in homes and buildings, and affordable energy solutions based on low-carbon power sources to keep urban areas vibrant and livable.

The Siemens-sponsored Asian Green City Index, created by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2011, assessed the environmental performance of 22 major cities in Asia, many of which have climate-protection guidelines in place. The results revealed Singapore to be Asia's greenest metropolis, with the report noting a strong commitment by city planners to setting and achieving environmental targets.

Dr. Busch insists that establishing clear targets for sustainable development is critical to making progress. "We need to rethink the way critical infrastructure is designed, financed, and implemented," he says, adding that cities help themselves grow when they focus on energy production and distribution, plus the development of efficient transportation and logistics networks.

The booming Chinese cities of Wuhan, Nanjing, and Xian are currently enrolled in Complete and Green Mobility Partnerships with Siemens, to provide big-picture thinking to their sustainable development goals. "It is a concept designed to achieve optimized coordination among transport systems, to move passengers and goods in fast, safe, efficient, and environmentally friendly ways," says Dr. Busch.

"We need to rethink the way critical infrastructure is designed, financed, and implemented."

For example, Siemens traffic controllers monitor congestion and vehicle flow at 500 intersections serving Wuhan's 9.7 million people. "Real-time traffic data is sent to data centers, where a central management system calculates and optimizes traffic lights and other controls," he explains. "This minimizes congestion and makes traffic flow more smoothly."

In Nanjing, home to eight million people, Siemens is helping its various transportation systems work together more effectively. The city's metro lines use a Siemens signaling system. Trains and a control center exchange information in real time so that the intervals between trains are shorter, and the frequency can be adjusted to respond to changes in local conditions and passenger volume.

"Cities all over the world, notably the rapidly growing metropolises and mega-cities in emerging countries such as India and China, need strong public transport systems with bus and mass transit networks that complement each other," insists Dr. Busch. "Intermodal models offer a sustainable solution in the long term; efficiently interconnecting diverse transportation systems with integrated mobility solutions."



"The earlier you start proper planning, the lower the price you pay in getting it done right."



URBAN PLANNING INSIGHTS

Dr. Liu Thai-Ker, Chairman of the Center for Livable Cities, Singapore

Dr. Liu Thai-Ker is an architect-planner known for his role in shaping Singapore's public housing. He is also Director of RSP Architects, and adjunct professor of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

In the 1960s, 1.3 million of Singapore's 1.9 million people lived in squatter communities. Today, most of Singapore's 5.3 million residents live in affordable tower blocks, enjoying the cultural gifts of a city efficiently serviced by a modern mass transit system. This transformation didn't just happen—it required vision and planning.

City planner and architect Dr. Liu Thai-Ker is credited with shaping the modern city-state of Singapore, serving at the helm of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) and at the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). He insists that Singapore's success proves that high-density living can be green, while securing a good quality of life for its residents.

His vision for the future of this equatorial island in Southeast Asia is for even higher-density living—but with a touch of the charm that he says animates small European towns. While Singapore has succeeded in housing the masses, it has also been careful to preserve the character of old shop houses, constructing new tower blocks away from historic districts.

The bulk of Singapore's population lives in some two dozen towns, each housing between 70,000 and 250,000 people, providing employment, clinics, schools, department stores, cinemas, and leisure, all supported by mass transit. "Even the poorest citizens have a roof overhead," says Dr. Liu.

"Most people who live in these towns have no need to travel for daily necessities—this keeps the environment clean by minimizing the burning of

fuel while elevating the quality of life. They spend less time on the road and more time at home or doing what they choose."

Pollution control has been a priority for Singapore from the start, with planners encouraging the development of non-polluting industries and enforcing strict pollution-control measures. An important industrial park, for example, was located some distance from the residential center, but with enough people living nearby to provide labor that did not have to travel too far.

"The earlier you start proper planning, the lower the price you pay in getting it done right," says Liu. "We wasted very little money on our developments. HDB has built just over a million units of public housing, and we have demolished fewer than 6,000 units. That is a very low level of waste."

Singapore, like the rest of Asia, will face continued population pressures. "Our population has increased, as has density, but the environment has improved. With skill, care, and long-term vision, we can have our cake and eat it, too: ample living space, high density growth, sound quality of life, good traffic flow, efficient public transportation, ample amenities, and better environmental outcomes."

"Planning for the needs of a city costs almost nothing—just a consultant's fee and a few pieces of paper," Liu concludes. "But the benefits, as Singapore has experienced them, are enormous."

Stella Danker is a freelance journalist based in New York. She specializes in renewable energy, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and the Asia-Pacific region.

SINGAPORE SESSIONS. WHAT'S NEXT.

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which are native to the steppes of Central Asia, could take up the slack left by the vanished North American *Camelops*. The authors—almost all of them were academics—envisioned a series of small-scale experiments leading up to the creation of “one or more ‘ecological history parks,’” which would cover “vast areas of economically depressed parts of the Great Plains.” In these huge “history parks,” elephants, camels, and African cheetahs—to replace the missing American cheetah—would roam freely. The ecologists called their plan “an optimistic alternative” to what was otherwise likely to be a future filled with “ever more pest-and-weed dominated landscapes” and “the extinction of most, if not all, large vertebrates.”

The lead author of the *Nature* article, Josh Donlan, now runs a nonprofit group called Advanced Conservation Strategies and is a visiting fellow at Cornell. He characterized reactions to Pleistocene rewilding as “bimodal.”

“People either loved it or hated it, both in the scientific community and in the public,” he told me. In the United States, Pleistocene rewilding never got very far, the only practical step that’s been taken has been the reintroduction to private land in New Mexico of a giant tortoise known as the Bolton tortoise. (The Bolton tortoise, which disappeared from what’s now the U.S. about eight thousand years ago, survived south of the border in very small numbers.) As it happened, though, a Russian scientist named Sergey Zimov had a similar idea. Also in 2005, he published an article in *Science* describing an experimental preserve in Siberia that he had set up and named the Pleistocene Park. Zimov’s aim was to show that the area, which ten thousand years or so ago supported great herds of large mammals, was still capable of doing so.

“We are not trying exactly to reconstruct the mammoth steppe ecosystem, because we don’t have the mammoth,” Zimov told me recently by phone from St. Petersburg. “But we are trying to reconstruct the highly productive steppe ecosystem.” Zimov brought in reindeer and a breed of very cold-hardy horses known as Yakutians. A few years ago, he imported five European bison to the park, but only one—a male—survived the second winter. “Now we are looking



“How can Greece be doing so badly? Everyone I know is eating Greek yogurt.”

for girlfriends,” Zimov said. Several musk oxen were also brought in, but they, too, were all males. “We also search females for them,” Zimov told me. The Pleistocene Park, which is in northeastern Siberia, is so remote that almost no one who isn’t conducting research there has ever visited it.

As Europeans have taken up the term, “rewilding” has shifted its meaning yet again. The concept has become at once less threatening and more gastronomically appealing: it is expected that visitors to the continent’s rewilded regions will be able to enjoy not just the safari-like tours but also the local cuisine. (One park in Portugal in the process of “rewilding” offers its own brand of olive oil.)

Rewilding Europe, the group that is pushing the concept most vigorously, was founded three years ago by two Dutchmen, a Swede, and a Scot. One of the Dutchmen, Wouter Helmer, lives not far from the field where Manolo and Rocky are pastured, and the day after I visited the bulls I went to meet him at his house, which is at the edge of a park, in a small clearing that made me think of Goldilocks.

Helmer explained that the goal of Rewilding Europe was, in effect, to create giant versions of the Oostvaardersplassen, each at least fifteen times as large. “Frans Vera always says, ‘If the Dutch

can do it, everyone can do it,’” he told me. To get the project started, the group has raised more than six million euros—roughly seven and a half million dollars—much of it from the Dutch post-code lottery, which might be compared to the New York State lottery, except that the proceeds go to charity. Last year, after receiving twenty applications from organizations across the continent, the group chose five regions to serve as what it calls “model rewilding areas”—a part of the Danube Delta, spanning the border of Romania and Ukraine; an area in the southern Carpathian Mountains, also known as the Transylvanian Alps; and areas in the eastern Carpathians, the mountains of Croatia, and the western Iberian Peninsula. One quality these areas share is that fewer and fewer people want to live in them.

“There’s no economy in big parts of Europe,” Helmer told me. “We think it’s a window of opportunity.” The idea is to rewild the areas by connecting existing reserves with tracts of abandoned land and working farms whose owners can be persuaded to let a herd of aurochs (or tauros) wander across their property. (The lure for landowners is supposed to be an influx of tourists, who will come and open their wallets.)

Helmer stressed to me that Rewilding Europe was not particularly concerned

about whether the new landscape that would be created would resemble the ancient one that had been altered or destroyed. "We're not looking backward but forward," he said at one point.

"We try to avoid too much discussion of wilderness," he observed at another. "For us, that is not the most important thing—at the end will this be a wilderness or not? It will be wilder than it was, and that's what matters."

One morning not long after this, I found myself sitting in a small hut, staring at a pile of dead chickens. The chickens had pure white feathers that were matted with blood, and they lay with their half-severed heads and rigid legs tilted at grotesque angles. After a while, a half-dozen Griffon vultures settled into a nearby tree. Griffon vultures are large birds with light-colored faces and dark bodies, and the group in the tree resembled a gathering of harpies. A little while later, a pair of black vultures showed up and began circling overhead. Black vultures are even larger than Griffons, with wingspans that can reach ten feet. They are majestic, funereal-looking birds, and watching them feels like a premonition of one's own death. The chickens had been laid out as part of a supplementary feeding program for the birds, who, it seemed, were not hungry. The black vultures continued to circle, the Griffon vultures continued to sit in the tree, and the small hut grew stiffer. After a few hours, my companion, Diego Benito, decided that the spectacle we had come to see was not going to take place, and so, disappointed, we left.

Benito runs a thirteen-hundred-acre nature preserve in far western Spain called the Campanarios de Azaba. The preserve is part of the Rewilding Europe "model area" in western Iberia, and of the five areas it's the easiest to get to. Nevertheless, the trip there involves a four-hour drive from Madrid, through the provinces of Ávila and Salamanca.

Since the vultures weren't cooperating, Benito suggested we tour the rest of the reserve. Until fairly recently, the place had been a farm, and it was dotted with oak trees whose acorns had gone to fattening pigs. It was hot and dry as we crunched along through the underbrush. Even though I knew the nearest town

wasn't more than a few miles away, the terrain seemed empty enough to get lost in, and I was reminded of a time in the New Mexico desert when I'd read a trail map wrong and found myself walking in circles. We encountered some very handsome horses, which, Benito told me, belonged to a rare and ancient Spanish breed known as Retuertas. Farther on, we came to a fenced-in area filled with a network of small but clearly man-made tunnels. These, Benito explained, had been dug for the benefit of rabbits, which in Spain—and, indeed, throughout Europe—have been decimated by a disease known as myxomatosis. The myoma virus was purposefully introduced on a private estate in France as a rabbit-control measure in the nineteenth century and has since spread across the continent. (The loss of rabbits has led to a decline in animals that prey on rabbits, like the Iberian lynx, which is now considered to be critically endangered.) The fences were supposed to protect some reintroduced rabbits from foxes, but the rabbits had refused to stay put, so now the enclosures were empty. The same was true of a series of circular platforms that had been erected in some oak trees as nesting sites for black storks. The black storks hadn't been interested in them.

"You can't be a hundred per cent sure of success, because wild animals are wild animals," Benito told me. We went looking for some Sayaguesa cows that had recently been purchased with Rewilding Europe money, but they seemed to be avoiding us. Sayaguesas are another primitive breed of interest to the TaurOs program, an enterprise that Benito told me he was eager to get involved in. "If you want to sell a product, you have to have a story," he said.

That afternoon, after a lunch of local (and quite tasty) pork cutlets, we drove out of the reserve to the top of a nearby mountain. Along the way, we passed through a couple of villages that, Benito explained, were in the process of disappearing; the schools had closed for lack of children and only the old people remained. In one of the towns, La Encina, we stopped to meet the mayor, a slight, elderly man named José María. According to María, the number of residents in La Encina had dropped by more than fifty per cent in just the past fifteen

years. He was enthusiastic about the idea of rewilding, he said, because it had "a lot of potential to bring tourists." From the top of the mountain, we could see across to Portugal, some fifteen miles away. The valley was a patchwork of brown fields, pine forests that had been planted during the Franco era, and evenly spaced oaks of the sort I'd seen at the preserve. According to a brochure that Wouter Helmer had given me, the entire region was ripe for rewilding, owing to "rural depopulation"; the aim was to transform at least a thousand square kilometres, or two hundred and fifty thousand acres. I tried to imagine the whole valley converted into an Iberian version of the Oostvaardersplassen. Certainly it was a lot less populated than the outskirts of Amsterdam. Still, I realized, I wasn't sure what I was supposed to be envisioning. The pine plantations could never be considered wild: would they have to go? What about the pruned oaks, and the pigs that were still snuffling around them for acorns, and the brown fields, and all the tiny, dying towns waiting for an influx of tourists?

One of the appeals of rewilding is that it represents a proactive agenda—as Josh Donlan and his Pleistocene rewilding colleagues put it, a hopeful alternative to just sitting around, mourning what's been lost. In a rewilded world, even extinction need not be considered irrevocable; the aurochs will lie down with the lynx, and the deer and the elephants will roam. On a planet increasingly dominated by people—even the deep oceans today are being altered by humans—it probably makes sense to think about wilderness, too, as a human creation. The more I saw, the more I understood why Europeans, in particular, were attracted to the idea, and the more I wanted to be convinced that it could work. But, as I looked back toward the Campanarios de Azaba, I thought of the vacant rabbit tunnels and the empty platforms built for the storks, and I wasn't at all sure.

It was dusk by the time we headed down the mountain. Benito got a call on his cell phone from a local farmer who had a dead pig he thought the vultures might be interested in. On our way back, we stopped by to see what had happened to the chickens. Every one of them was gone, including the bones. ♦



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LETTER FROM UGANDA

OUT IN AFRICA

A gay-rights struggle with deadly stakes.

BY ALEXIS OKEOWO



Frank Mugisha, the head of the organization Sexual Minorities Uganda.

On a breezy October night two years ago, Frank Mugisha was having a beer with friends in Kampala, Uganda's capital. They had gathered at a gay-friendly bar called Tcozy, in a congested area full of pubs popular with students from Makerere University. Over the sound of screeching karaoke, Mugisha heard his name and turned to see a friend holding up a newspaper. It was a local tabloid called *Rolling Stone*, and the headline on the front page, next to photographs of Mugisha's friends David Kato, a gay activist, and Christopher Senyonjo, a human-rights advocate and former Anglican bishop, read "100 PICTURES OF UGANDA'S TOP HOMOS LEAK." The tagline was "Hang Them." Mugisha opened the paper to an article featuring his name, along with that of his boyfriend, Ronnie, and those of several friends. In some cases, their addresses, including Ronnie's, were also listed, and there were photos clearly taken from Facebook profiles. The paper had made

up quotes, and said that those named were using money and gifts to "recruit" new homosexuals, and were hosting orgies and infiltrating schools to enlist children. Mugisha, fearing a violent reaction from the public, worried for his friends.

The next morning, Mugisha took a copy of the paper to the modest bungalow that serves as the headquarters of Sexual Minorities Uganda, or SMUG, the country's largest gay-rights organization, which he leads. He scanned the article and e-mailed it to other gay-rights activists and lawyers. The fallout was immediate: the house of a transgender man whose name was on the tabloid's list was stoned by a crowd shouting, "We will kill you!" David Kato, at that time Uganda's best-known gay activist, began receiving death threats; he was murdered three months later. Police put the murder down to a random home invasion. But activists think that the killer, who also robbed Kato, was motivated by the common perception in Uganda that gays are

sent money and gifts by international donors. Ronnie, Mugisha's boyfriend of five years, was harassed and threatened by his own family and eventually fled to the United States. Ronnie's mother and his father, who owns a major business in Kampala, both learned that he was gay from the article. (Although activists are open about their work and much of their lives, many L.G.B.T. Ugandans I interviewed did not want to be identified by their full names.)

In 2009, a year before the article was published, David Bahati, a Ugandan politician, had introduced an anti-homosexuality bill to parliament. Commonly known as the "Kill the Gays" bill, it included a proposal to impose the death penalty on Ugandans who engaged in what it called "aggravated homosexuality," which means gay sex when one partner is H.I.V.-positive, disabled, a "serial offender," or a minor. Bahati told me that the death-penalty provision has been replaced by one calling for a life sentence, but, even so, any amendment to the bill as it stands has to go through parliament. And the bill remains troubling. If someone is found to be "promoting" homosexuality, he could be imprisoned for up to seven years. The broadly defined category of touching with "the intention to commit an act of homosexuality" can also bring a sentence of up to seven years.

When the *Rolling Stone* article came out, L.G.B.T. activists, already feeling under attack from the bill, which had not yet been put to a vote, decided to sue the paper for defamation and inciting violence. SMUG led the initiative, and last March I visited the group's headquarters, where eight activists occupy four sparsely furnished rooms. Mugisha's office is the locus of activity. The walls are cluttered with photographs of him at various awards ceremonies and conferences, along with postcards from well-wishers



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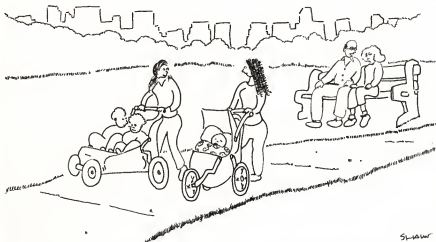


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"Personally, I wouldn't have a problem with a nanny state."

abroad. In the mornings, the office becomes a meeting room, where members strategize on how to design and implement upcoming campaigns, and on how to help out partner organizations. While I was there, SMUG was organizing a seminar to educate L.G.B.T.s in the law and the constitution. The wireless Internet network is named NOFEAR. In the afternoons, there is a steady stream of visitors, including foreign journalists and human-rights workers from other N.G.O.s.

The high court delayed judgment on *Rolling Stone* three times, and in the meantime the paper published an issue in which it outed more Ugandans and claimed that there was a connection between Ugandan gays and a Somali terrorist group. Finally, in early January of 2011, the court ordered the tabloid to stop publishing the identities of allegedly homosexual people. Soon afterward, *Rolling Stone* shut down. "We didn't even ask for the paper to close down—just to stop publishing the list," Mugisha told me. "We were asking for the right as human beings not to be defamed in the papers."

Mugisha is thirty years old, five feet three, and weighs a hundred and twenty pounds. He has prominent ears, large eyes, and upturned lips; he is often smiling, even when he is exasperated. His cell phone is protected by a neon-pink case, and the ringtone is Madonna's "Celebration." He came to SMUG five years ago. At the time, he was a graphic-design student. As a new member of

the then fringe gay-rights movement, he organized rallies, including SMUG's first coming-out march. Back then, most Ugandans would have looked at him blankly if he had told them about gay rights.

In the past two years, SMUG has documented more than fifty cases of discrimination, harassment, and violence against L.G.B.T.s in Uganda. Mugisha says that law-enforcement officers followed up on seventeen of these cases, but most were not even reported to the authorities, because the victims feared that the police would arrest them on trumped-up charges, like "indecent conduct." Mugisha frequently receives calls from gays he knows, and from many he doesn't, who want to talk, or who have been beaten up or evicted from their homes or blackmailed by policemen looking to score money with threats of arrest or expulsion. Mugisha will reassure them, bail them out using SMUG funds, even give them a place to sleep if they need one, at the premises of a gay support group, which Mugisha helped found, called Icebreakers Uganda.

In May, gay-activist groups, under SMUG's leadership, opened the country's first L.G.B.T. health clinic, a room in an office building on the outskirts of Kampala, where doctors and nurses see patients free of charge three days a week. In early August, Mugisha, wearing a sailor's outfit, marched in the country's first gay-pride parade, which was staged in the botanical gardens of the city of Entebbe,

on the shore of Lake Victoria. About a hundred Ugandans took part. The space, which was reserved on the pretense of a birthday celebration, had been chosen because it was secluded. Although the activists had asked for police protection, they did not receive it. The fantastical costumes on display—glittery fairies, homemade angel wings—made it look like New York's gay-pride parade, but there were key differences: the signs were pointedly not festive ("Killing Gay People Solves Nothing"), and many bystanders seemed confused by the spectacle. The police shut down the celebration under the orders of Simon Lokodo, the Ethics and Integrity Minister. They claimed, falsely, that a gay wedding was taking place. Three participants in drag were arrested, a photographer was detained, and statements were demanded from others. Still, Mugisha called the event a "great success": after those who had been arrested were released, the police chief apologized. "We explained what we were doing, and had a dialogue," Mugisha said.

Adrian Jjuuko, a twenty-eight-year-old lawyer, who coordinated the SMUG-led injunction against *Rolling Stone* in the high court, said that it was Mugisha who inspired him to work on gay rights, while he was still in law school. When I met Jjuuko, a nervous, intense man who is unfailingly formal, he shared his first impressions of Mugisha. "We have this idea that gay people are different, and Frank was not different," he said. "When we first met, he told me about his experience of realizing he was attracted to boys, and it just sounded like my own experience with girls." Jjuuko later told me that the *Rolling Stone* article had come at a key moment for the gay-rights movement. "We were just getting organized and were very eager to make a point," he said. Once *Rolling Stone* had been stopped, the activists could return to fighting Bahati's bill.

Kampala is a modernizing city, and the wealthier neighborhoods are full of cafés, shopping malls, and lush foliage. Mugisha grew up in a rougher, working-class part of town. When he was seven, his father was shot and killed on the way home from work. Mugisha never found out what happened. His mother brought him and a younger brother up alone. He was an extremely sociable child, who

loved theatre, lawn tennis, and handball. When he realized that he was gay, at thirteen, he tried to bargain with God: if he studied hard and got good grades, maybe God would take his desires away. He went to an all-boys school, where the students were humiliated by the headmaster and expelled if they were caught in intimate situations. At fourteen, he told his family that he was gay. Relatives took him to family friends who claimed that they could help him lose his homosexual feelings. His family still wishes that he would stay silent about his orientation. Mugisha says, "They ask me, 'Why does every person have to know you're gay?'"

Ugandans have traditionally been indifferent to homosexuality, as long as it stays in the closet. It is common in Uganda to see heterosexual men holding hands or dancing together. Several gay men told me that their families were not even suspicious when they spent time with their first male lovers in their childhood homes. In 1999, newspapers reported that two gay men held a marriage ceremony in Kampala. In response, Yoweri Museveni, who has been the President of Uganda since 1986, ordered police to look for gays and arrest them. "God created Adam and Eve as wife and husband," he said at the time, "but not men to marry fellow men."

Museveni's rhetoric no doubt encouraged the creation of Bahati's bill, which is particularly chilling because it emphasizes the reporting of the homosexual behavior of others. It allows the government to arrest and punish not just gays but people who knowingly interact with them: health-care workers, counsellors, employers, landlords. For three years after the bill was introduced, it was pushed from one parliamentary session to another, and, with all the delays, it looked as if it might never become law. But, in November, Rebecca Kadaga, the speaker of parliament, announced her intention to put the bill to a vote before parliament adjourned for the holidays. If a vote occurs, the bill looks set to pass.

As soon as the bill was introduced, the government was forced to justify its position to the world. (President Barack Obama has called the bill "odious.") In October, Kadaga sparred with John Baird, the Canadian foreign minister, who attacked Uganda's gay-rights record

at an Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting in Quebec. Kadaga accused Baird of having a colonial attitude.

Museveni has been a firm U.S. ally throughout his twenty-six-year rule. Bill Clinton called him the head of a "new breed of African leaders." George W. Bush praised him for his aggressive campaign to limit the spread of H.I.V. Rates of infection have declined sharply during his tenure, from eighteen per cent in 1992 to 7.3 per cent today, although in 2008 they started rising again. Perhaps because Museveni sent Ugandan troops to Somalia to support America's war on Al Qaeda-affiliated groups there, he has faced little criticism from the U.S. as he has crushed political opposition, tolerated corruption, and stood by as police committed human-rights abuses against the sizable Muslim minority. At home, he has done little to undermine Bahati's bill. Overseas, he has soothed worried allies with the suggestion that if the bill passes he will veto it, returning it to parliament for another vote. (In U.S. State Department cables obtained by WikiLeaks, Museveni is quoted as telling a U.S. official that Uganda is not interested in a "war with homosexuals," and agreeing that the legislation goes "too far.") He will almost certainly follow through on the veto, if only to try to save his dissolving international reputation. Recently, after it was revealed that his administration had misappropriated government funds, six countries cut or reduced aid to Uganda.

International disapproval of the Bahati bill has allowed Mugisha and his fellow-activists to strengthen the Ugandan gay-rights movement; until the bill was introduced, the word "gay" was rarely used. The ensuing conversation has made Uganda one of the most hopeful places for gays on a continent where thirty-seven countries criminalize homosexuality. "There was a lot of blackmail by the police before the bill," Mugisha said. "Before, you could be picked up and taken to prison. Now the police would think twice before doing anything to me."

The activists' resistance to the bill has been controlled and strategic. Instead of organizing street protests (which still pose safety risks), Mugisha has pushed for one-on-one meetings with members of parliament. He knows that any public spectacle could sway politicians further in

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favor of the bill, which has tremendous popular support. (A 2010 survey by the Pew Research Center found that seventy-nine per cent of Ugandans think homosexuality is morally unacceptable.)

Whereas previously it would have been professional suicide to aid the L.G.B.T. population, there is now a broader array of activists willing to challenge extreme legislation. Fifty Ugandan gay- and human-rights organizations have banded together to fight the bill's passage. Chris Dolan, the director of a Ugandan organization called the Refugee Law Project, is part of the coalition opposing the bill. He told me that his group wanted to get involved so that they could "confront homophobes" with people who aren't gay.

Anti-gay advocates like Bahati claim that they are defending "African values" from neocolonialists. Yet their efforts are also informed by outside forces—in particular, by American missionaries. Pentecostalism arrived in Uganda more than fifty years ago and is now one of the country's fastest-growing religions. Many congregations, orphanages, clinics, and schools are sponsored or funded by evangelical churches in the U.S. To American evangelicals losing ground at home, Uganda offered a new opportunity for a Christianized nation. The First Lady, Janet Museveni, is a Christian fundamentalist and has met with the American evangelical Rick Warren several times; evangelical pastors regularly fill stadiums.

Bahati has said that the idea for his bill grew out of a conversation he had, in 2008, with members of an American organization known as the Fellowship. The Fellowship, whose members include Republican politicians, wants governments to act in accord with Christian principles. Bahati, who is soft-spoken but has a tendency to bombast, was first elected to parliament in 2006, a year after he attended a conservative leadership course outside Washington. He now helps lead the Ugandan branch of the Fellowship, which, by his estimate, counts about a third of parliament among its members. Rick Warren and American members of the Fellowship have visited Uganda repeatedly to speak to political and church leaders, and homosexuality is one of their topics. In March of 2009, Scott Lively, an American evangelical pastor, led a series of

talks in Kampala, at which he and two colleagues spoke to thousands of attendees about the abuse of teen-age boys by gay men and the evils of gay marriage. He advised members of the Ugandan parliament that gays should be provided with therapy. Five months later, Bahati introduced his bill, using language that echoes Lively's writings. A draft of the bill's preamble, for instance, says that children are the "most vulnerable to recruitment into the homosexual lifestyle." Martin Ssempe, a prominent Ugandan pastor who supports the bill, told me that he has met with Lively twice, and he praised his book "Seven Steps to Recruit-Proof Your Child." (Lively told me that Bahati had gone too far: "He cares for his country, but the bill is just too harsh. I don't support the death penalty, even for pedophiles." Warren, under pressure, has tweeted that he does not approve of the bill.)

In July, Mugisha agreed to debate Lively in Washington, D.C., for "The Stream," a show on the Al Jazeera English television network. Several months earlier, SMUG had sued Lively in a Massachusetts court over his involvement in the effort to persecute gay people in Uganda, citing his influence on the drafting of Bahati's bill. SMUG, whose members had spent months gathering evidence of Lively's anti-gay teachings, is being represented by the Center for Constitutional Rights, in New York. The suit is based on the alien-tort statute, which allows foreigners to file civil lawsuits against Americans for violations of international law, and is the first to be lodged on the basis of sexual orientation. On the set, against a glowing backdrop of laptop screens, Mugisha, in a salmon-pink collared shirt under a dark blazer, sat at a long table. Lively, whose face is framed by a full beard, spoke via satellite, his image projected on a screen. Mugisha's only sign of emotion was an occasional knowing smile.

Lively alleged that there was a "gay agenda" in Uganda. Mugisha responded, "I am talking to people who are being constantly raped by their families because of who they are." He was referring to the practice of "corrective rape," which some lesbians and transgender women in Uganda have suffered at the hands of relatives or other people they know. "I'm

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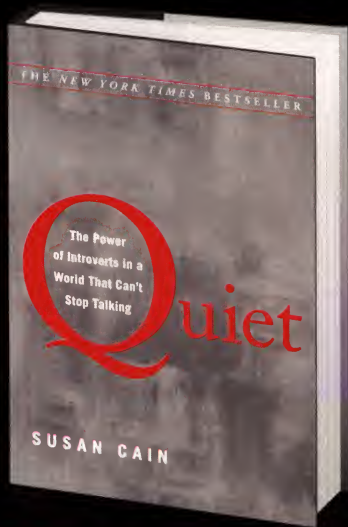
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talking about people being beaten on the streets. We are speaking about these violations, and you call that a gay agenda?" Lively was undeterred, asking, "Am I the only one who wants to have a family-based society?"

Sometimes Mugisha engages in debates that are surprisingly genial. One morning earlier this year, he was a special guest on "Minibuzz," a show that features everyday Ugandans talking about current issues while riding in a *matatu*, or minibus. On this occasion, the van was travelling through rush-hour traffic in Kampala. Not knowing how the other guests would react to the topic of homosexuality, Mugisha looked wary. Although he is well known among an educated segment of the population, none of the commuters featured on this episode of "Minibuzz" knew that he was gay.

The air-conditioned van was outfitted with cameras and microphones, and the young hosts, a man and a woman, sat in the back. Mugisha sat in the middle, near a window, with a bemused look on his face as he listened to two men say that they had seen gay people only on television, and an older man explain that men were being seduced into the gay life style "because of wanting to get rich quickly."

A woman next to Mugisha said, in Luganda, "These days, we don't pray, we don't listen to the words in church." The woman said that her college-educated, unemployed younger brother was courted by a "man from abroad" with money and gifts. "If someone has God, you can't do something like that," she said.

"You say that gays and lesbians can't be Christian," Mugisha responded carefully, as he fidgeted with a newspaper on his lap. "Your younger brother had feelings for another guy. Where did his feelings come from? Maybe we can't explain them. If he has faith, do you really want those feelings to stop him from going to church?"

"You sound like an activist," the male host interjected, seeming eager to keep the conversation light. Everyone laughed and started talking at once.

After the show ended, Mugisha said that he felt he had changed most of the

other participants' minds a little. Off-camera, he had encouraged the religious woman to be more mindful of her brother's feelings. "I think she came halfway around," he said. But he admitted that he sometimes felt frustrated: "On almost a daily basis, I meet very many people of that kind, and it can feel like my activism work has gone back to square one."

Mugisha recognizes that he needs to frame his push for gay rights as a Ugandan effort. "We say that in this country people have always been persecuted for being different, because they're women, because of tribal differences, because of ethnicity, and then people understand it," he says. Rahul Rao, a professor of politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies, in London, told me that Ugandan activists have begun to emphasize the ways in which they are distinct. "The term that Ugandan sexual minorities use for themselves is *kuchu*—Swahili slang for 'gays,'" he said.

"But the borrowing of identities first cast in the West does make them vulnerable to being seen as Western."

Maintaining credibility in Uganda means keeping a distance from well-meaning American or European politicians and human-rights groups, but some of the progress of the L.G.B.T. movement in Uganda has been due to Mugisha's appeals for international solidarity, and the resulting pressure put on the Ugandan government by Western countries. SMUG was founded by Ugandan activists, but most of its money comes from the Fund for Global Human Rights, an American nonprofit foundation. "We cannot get funded by any Ugandan organization," Mugisha said, a little defensively but not inaccurately. "I would be very happy if institutions in Uganda funded us. They would make our work legitimate."

Mugisha's international reputation continues to grow. In November, 2011, he received that year's Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. In that role, he attended this year's World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, in Chicago, where he was photographed with Sean Penn, who was there to receive a Peace Summit award. The top of Mugisha's head reached

Penn's chin. Samuel L. Jackson, who hosted this year's Black Entertainment Television Awards, gave a shout-out to Mugisha during the broadcast, referring to the anti-gay bill and praising him as "courageous." Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Uganda in August to present Mugisha and other activists with the 2011 Human Rights Defenders Award, calling them "organized, disciplined, and savvy."

One night, Mugisha went to dinner at a restaurant on the roof of the city's biggest mall with his assistant, Richard Lusimbo; Pepe Julian Onziema, a SMUG activist; and Onziema's girlfriend. They discussed a workshop they had run that day with grassroots activists, as Mugisha flipped through e-mails on his phone. He looked exhausted.

"O.K., Frank, time out, time out," Onziema's girlfriend said, gesturing toward Mugisha's phone.

"Two seconds," Mugisha said.

The group ordered ribs and bourbon, and Lusimbo announced that he was worried about his boyfriend, who had missed two days of work and a job interview. Lusimbo believed that he was under what activists call "house arrest," meaning that the family of an L.G.B.T. hold him captive at home and harangue him until he promises to abandon his partners and gay friends. "Sometimes parents can be O.K., then the next moment they can turn on you," Mugisha said. "He won't be locked up forever."

Onziema's girlfriend brought up the fiftieth anniversary of Uganda's independence, to be celebrated in October, and the group debated the merits of the national anthem. Mugisha had told me that he felt he had a responsibility to make the country better. "I've had so many offers to take asylum in other places, but this is my country, and I'm not going to leave," he said.

Lusimbo sweetly sang a couple of verses of the national song. "It's the most beautiful anthem in the world," he proclaimed.

Mugisha nodded. "Exactly," he said.

Two months later, in mid-June, Mugisha led another gathering of activists, on the edge of Kampala. It was stormed by the police under Lokodo's orders. For tonight, though, singing Uganda's national anthem was enough. ♦



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A women's theatre in rural Turkey.

BY ELIF BATUMAN

One afternoon in 2000, a high-school principal in Arslanköy, a village in the Taurus Mountains, in southern Turkey, received an unexpected visit from a middle-aged, blue-eyed peasant woman in a head scarf. Averting her eyes and covering her mouth when she spoke, she introduced herself as Ümmiye Koçak, and

farmworker with a primary-school education, had caught the theatre bug from a school play that the principal had staged the previous year. The play dramatized the village's role in the Turkish War of Independence, in 1919, when a company of locals fired the first shots against the occupying French Army. To

came housekeepers; at home, they were wives and mothers. "I kept turning it over in my head, how is it that I do all these things," she later recalled. "Then I saw Hüseyin's theatre. That's when I decided that the thing I'd been turning over in my head was theatre."

The day after her meeting with the




Ümmiye Koçak (in crown), the director of the Arslanköy Women's Theatre, playing the lead in her adaptation of "Hamlet."

asked him to help her start a theatre for the women of the village. "Imagine," the principal, Hüseyin Arslanköylü, later wrote. "She leaves the fields and orchards, and turns up here! . . . Theatre, she says!" He told her to come back when she had assembled a cast and asked permission from the women's husbands.

Ümmiye Koçak, a forty-four-year-old

honor their bravery, Kemal Atatürk, Turkey's first President, gave the village its current name, which means "lion village." Ümmiye had never seen a play before, and it seeped into her thoughts. For a long time, she had been puzzling over the situation of village women—the many roles they had to play. In the fields, they worked like men; in villas, they be-

principal, Ümmiye returned with seven village women. Some could barely read. Most were in their forties and had several children. She later told me that it hadn't been easy to get them all on board: they kept saying that they didn't know how to act. Ümmiye persuaded them that they already played roles, every day—that the theatre was all around them, whether they



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liked it or not. The principal warned them that their theatrical aspirations would expose them to gossip and derision. But Ümmiye thought that she could curtail gossip by excluding men: women would play all the male roles themselves, wearing mustaches made of goatskin.

The Arslanköy Women's Theatre Group met every night at the school, after the women had worked ten- or twelve-hour days on farms. Their first production, a contemporary Turkish play called "Stone Almonds," sold out a theatre in the provincial capital of Mersin, and was written up in the national press. They were invited to Istanbul, to be on TV. None of the women had even been on an intercity bus before. At a rest stop, Ümmiye confronted her first set of revolving doors. For a long time, she remained on one side of the doors, despairing of ever reaching the other side.

Slowly, more productions and more successes followed. In 2003, the women collaborated on a play called "Woman's Outcry," based on their own difficult life experiences, which included kidnapping, forced marriage, and domestic abuse. They performed the play in Arslanköy, in front of their husbands and village officials. In 2006, "The Play," a documentary film about "Woman's Outcry," became an international success, winning prizes at the Trieste and Tribeca festivals. Ümmiye travelled abroad for the first time, attending galas in Spain. She began to dream of staging Shakespeare, and of making a movie. In 2009, she played the title role in her own adaptation of "Hamlet." This spring, she finished shooting her first screenplay, about a downtrodden mother and daughter who herd goats in the Taurus Mountains.

It can be difficult to grasp just how remarkable these achievements are. In the nineteen-twenties and thirties, Atatürk's secularizing reforms put Turkey at the vanguard of feminism. Turkish women got the vote in 1934, before women in Italy and France. Atatürk's daughter was a combat pilot. But in rural Turkey the new secular constitution had little effect on the old patriarchal culture, and women's lives continued much as they always had. Today, some Turkish women are C.E.O.s, best-selling novelists, Olympic gold medalists, and Constitutional Court judges. Other Turkish women—hundreds of thousands of them—are rape vic-

tims or child brides. Women make up only twenty-seven per cent of the Turkish paid workforce. An estimated thirty per cent of rural Turkish women haven't completed elementary school, and forty-seven per cent have been beaten or raped by their husbands.

The Islamist party headed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been Turkey's Prime Minister since 2003, has signed a charter condemning child marriage. His government has passed laws criminaliz-



ing rape within marriage and making honor killings punishable by a life sentence, and it has provided classes to teach police how to handle domestic violence. Nonetheless, during the first seven years of Erdoğan's tenure, the murder rate of women rose fourteenfold. Legal measures are worth little when the Prime Minister openly promotes the patriarchal mores that made them necessary in the first place. Erdoğan has often stated that every married woman in Turkey should bear at least three children. Once, he boosted the number to five. He thinks that Cesarean births decrease women's fertility, and has characterized both Cesareans and abortions as an insidious plot to stunt Turkey's growth. The number of requests filed by parents to marry underage daughters has risen in the past year, and fourteen per cent of all marriages now involve an underage girl.

Ümmiye comes from a world where women don't read books, control their finances, or leave home in the evenings. They keep men's secrets, because when they don't they can't count on shelters or the police for protection. In most documented cases, the police have sent battered women back to their violent relatives. At least three women who went to state shelters were ordered to make peace with their husbands and were later murdered by them. Last year, the blood-stained handbag of a woman shot eight times by her partner on a crowded street

was found to contain a legal complaint she had registered against him two days before.

When I drove into Arslanköy on an overcast afternoon in May, it looked like a typical one-street Turkish village, with a mosque, a coffeehouse, a baker, a butcher, and a general store. The store sold Coke, but not diet Coke. The village has twenty-five hundred inhabitants, most of whom are descended from the Yörük, a nomadic people believed to have migrated to the Taurus Mountains from Central Asia in the eleventh century. Perhaps because of the Yörük influence, Islam is observed less strictly in Arslanköy than in some other southeastern Turkish villages. The women are famous for their toughness. They cut wood and work on construction sites. During the War of Independence, they carried ammunition on their backs to the soldiers. In 1946, several Arslanköy women, some of them pregnant, defied the police rather than turn over the village's ballot box to a corrupt headman. Many were shot at and imprisoned, including a certain Grandma Halime, who reportedly threw herself on the ballot box, declaring, "The vote is our honor—we won't surrender our honor."

I met Ümmiye at her house, a little way from the main street, up a wooded slope. She was dressed in the loose shalvar pants, head scarf, and bright-blue vulcanized-rubber shoes commonly worn by Anatolian village women. Now in her mid-fifties, she projects an air less of strength than of tenacity. She has a distinctive voice—soft and almost girlish, but with a piercing quality. One of ten siblings, she was the only girl to receive any formal schooling. When she was eight, a new initiative required families to send at least one daughter to primary school. A younger sister was six, the right age to enroll, but she was shy. Ümmiye took her place. She was dying to learn to read. Her village, some distance from Arslanköy, had no library, but she talked people into lending her books. The first book she borrowed, from a teacher, was "Mother," by Maxim Gorky. It taught her that people everywhere were basically the same. "He wrote about people like us in the village," she told me. "The stove was a stove like ours, the shivering was shivering."

When she was in her early teens, Ümmiye began writing stories herself. Her

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PAUL RICE
FAIR TRADE USA



Photo: Paul Rice (right), president and CEO of Fair Trade USA, with Jose Antonio Benavides, a Colombian coffee farmer from the cooperative Federación Campesina del Cauca.

In the summer of 1990, on a Nicaraguan mountaintop, Paul Rice stood before a formidable assembly and took a major step toward fomenting the Fair Trade movement.

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"In the developing world, we use the term 'empowerment' a lot," Rice says. "That's empowerment."

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"We work with five million people," says Rice. "But the global poverty statistics tell us that two billion people live on less than two dollars a day. Fair Trade can and should do more."

One challenge Rice has identified is that of self-image. In Central America, Rice discovered that personal reassurances, delivered in homes, schools, and churches, were key to persuading farmers to envision themselves as exporters, whether their product be coffee, chocolate, bananas, or honey.

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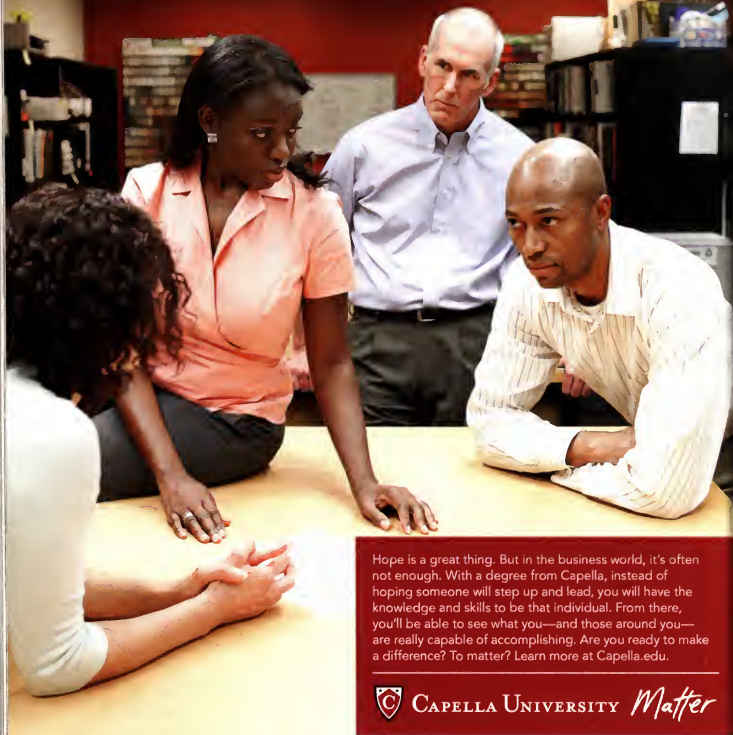
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first one, "The Goat Beauty," was about a childless woman who prays to God, "Please give me a daughter, even if she's a goat at night." God gives her precisely such a daughter, who grows up to be so beautiful that a rich man's son wants to marry her. "Ah, my girl, you can't marry anyone," the mother says. "Just look: at night, you become a goat." The rich man's family decks the girl out with bracelets and gold watches, and the mother prays again: "Either make her a full-time girl or take her back!" In the morning, she goes to her daughter's bed and finds her dead.

Ümmiye describes her own mother as young, uneducated, and innocent: she would pick up cigarette papers on the street and, because they had Arabic writing on them and looked to her like pages from the Koran, kissed them and kept them in a high place, as befits the word of God. A few years ago, a reporter asked Ümmiye if she knew the meaning of her name. She didn't, and wasn't pleased to learn that *ümmi* is Arabic for "illiterate." (It's one of the epithets of Muhammad, who is said to have been illiterate at the time he received the prophecies.) *Üm* is also the Arabic word for "mother," and thus the two preoccupations of Ümmiye's dramatic work—education and mother—were prefigured in her name.

As one of the few literate girls in the village, Ümmiye wrote love letters for older girls. When her brothers were in the military, she wrote them letters from the family. She liked to listen, and to know everything about everyone. She says that's why she doesn't have to invent anything in the plays she writes. When I asked how the plays were received by the people she wrote about, she said that they usually didn't recognize themselves. She left school at the age of twelve. At nineteen, she married a man from Arslanköy, in an arranged marriage. She has two sons and a daughter, who acts in, and helps manage, the theatre.

In 2006, Ümmiye wrote an autobiographical play called "Flowers of Longing," describing her philosophy of theatre. The first act is about a woman called Hatice, whose daughter Elif wants to go to school, but whose husband needs Elif to work in the fields to finance his drinking habit; he has already promised her in marriage to a village man. When Hatice objects, he beats her, causing her to miscarriage their fifth child. In despair, she de-

cides to drink poison. Elif stops her just in time, and tells her that all mothers are "flowers of longing." The second act isn't a continuation of the first but a new story, about a woman who starts a theatre. Her name is Hasret, which means "Longing." The title, "Flowers of Longing," has a double meaning: the play narrates the creative flourishing of a woman called Longing, but it also represents the artistic transformation of Hatice's longing.

Ümmiye keeps an archive of her theatre at a rented cottage on the outskirts of Mersin. One afternoon, she invited me over for lunch, with some of the theatre members. We sat on a blanket on a concrete patio, by a little grove of apricot, fig, and lemon trees. Prickly pears were just turning red on the cacti. Ümmiye and her daughter, Duygu, brought out tomatoes, cucumbers, and mint, which some of the theatre members started slicing for tabbouleh. Ümmiye's husband followed them out of the house. Kindly and dishevelled in appearance, he didn't impress one as a forceful personality. Ümmiye sent him back to the kitchen to fetch boiling water for the bulgur.

Duygu came out with some of the archive: armloads of plastic folders, typescripts, and appointment calendars given away by banks, which Ümmiye uses as notebooks. I began perusing nine years' worth of yellowed newspaper clippings. One headline—"WITH DOUGH ON HER HANDS, SHE WILL SHOOT A FILM"—alluded to a venerable idiom of Turkish patriarchy: "Those with dough on their hands shouldn't meddle with a man's work." There were many articles about "Woman's Outcry," the 2003 production based on the theatre members' life experiences.

The plot drew most heavily from the stories of two of the women: Zeynep and Ümmü. In the documentary about the production, Zeynep describes how, when she was heavily pregnant and suffering from cramps, her husband, who beat her when he drank, gave her one-way bus fare to take their sick toddler to a clinic. The doctor took one look at Zeynep and said that she was about to give birth. Alone, with no money, she delivered the baby and got seven stitches. Later, as she collected wood to heat water for the baby's bath, she wondered why God hadn't let her die in labor. Ümmü's story was about her longing to become a teacher: she had

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made it all the way to the second year of high school, when her elder brother kidnapped a thirteen-year-old to make her his wife. To avoid a blood feud, Ümmü's parents insisted that she marry the girl's brother. They locked her in a room for three days and wore her down. Two months later, Ümmü ran away, but she had nowhere to go. Later, she got married again, to a lazy drunk.

"Woman's Outcry," written by the school principal, combined these stories into two acts. In Act I, a battered wife gives birth to a premature daughter, whom her husband names Aytül, after an old sweetheart. (Two of the nine actresses had been named after a former girlfriend of their father's.) In Act II, set fifteen years later, Aytül's brother has kidnapped a thirteen-year-old girl. Ordered to marry the kidnapped girl's brother, Aytül—played by forty-seven-year-old Ümmü—runs away to her teacher's house.

One rehearsal of "Woman's Outcry" was broken up by the police, because the women hadn't applied for a permit to stage a play. Police oppression was duly incorporated into the script. In the final scene, an officer tries to stop Aytül and her teacher from starting their own theatre. When Aytül talks back, he beats her to the ground. The play's narrator steps forward and deplors Aytül's fate: "She received her first beating from her father,

when she was in her mother's belly. Her last beating came from the police. . . . This theatre, it seems, is over." But then Aytül stands up. "This theatre isn't over," she declares. "Our children won't suffer what we suffered." The cast chants the final lines in unison: "We will work, and we will succeed. We are humans! Humans!"

In the documentary, you can see a large assembly of villagers at the opening night of "Woman's Outcry." Many women in the audience seem completely lost in the performance, eyes shining, mouths ajar. The men's reactions are more complicated. Most look alternately bemused, uneasy, and proud. At least two husbands have come out to support their wives. They seem not to be bad sports. One of the women says that her husband praised her performance as a wife-beater. "You guys made him just like me," she quotes him saying. "It came out good."

After "Woman's Outcry," Ümmü decided to start writing and staging plays herself, with a new group of actors, from the Mersin area. (The school principal continues to write for the original group, now known as the Arslanköy Tent Theatre Women's Group.) While writing, Ümmü slept, like Napoleon, three or four hours a night. Every morning, she got up a little after two to do the day's baking. At three, a truck came to take her to an orchard two hours away, where she

picked oranges and lemons for up to twelve hours. Then, after cooking dinner for her family, she wrote for two hours before bed. Ümmü has written ten plays, most involving mother-daughter relationships. The new group included two high-school graduates. One, Seher, married at sixteen, and completed high school as an adult. She is forty-six, and has two grandchildren. She has a large, expressive face and wide-set eyes, and can play pretty much anyone, from dramatic leads to comic characters. The other, Ayfer, who is forty-one, started acting in her teens. She gave it up when she got married, and joined Ümmü's group after she got divorced. She specializes in male roles, especially villains. Men's clothes suit her trim figure, and she has a knack for handling a whip. She lives with her sixteen-year-old daughter, selling aloe-vera products, cleaning houses, and making occasional trips to Istanbul to play bit roles in soap operas.

Sorting through the pile of scripts in the archive, I found a copy of Ümmü's "Hamlet," and opened it at random.

"Alas, poor Yorick!" I read aloud.

"I knew him," Ümmü said promptly. "He had a way of joking, of conversation." Her expression turned serious. "You know," she said, "there's something I'd like to ask you about that scene. When Hamlet says, 'How many times I kissed this one, this Yorick, on the lips.' Well, Yorick is a man. And Hamlet is also a man." She asked if I had any explanation, and I confessed that I did not, observing only that Hamlet was a little boy at the time. "Well, of course he was," Ümmü said. "But it still seems odd. With us in Turkey, little boys don't kiss grown men on the lips."

Everyone agreed that it was odd. "Hamlet was a homosexual," Seher said quietly, not looking up from the tomato she was dicing, and this theory was debated for some minutes. Ümmü couldn't accept it, because wasn't the whole point that he was in love with his mother?

In her adaptation, Ümmü changed many of the names to ones that a Turkish audience would know. Hamlet became Hamit, Horatio became Hurşit, and Polonius became Şahin, which means "hawk," perhaps because Hamit knows one from a handsaw. Only Shakespeare's name couldn't be changed, which was unfortunate, because the women couldn't



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pronounce it. Ümmiye wrote the Turkish transliteration, Şekspir, on their hands, so they could contemplate it while working in the fields.

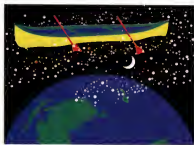
"Hamit" toured in several Turkish cities, drawing sizable audiences. At some point, the actress playing Gertrude reached her eighth month of pregnancy and couldn't fall dead to the floor anymore, so Ümmiye wrote an alternate ending in which nobody dies and Hamit just goes really crazy.

During our first meeting, I asked Ümmiye if it had been difficult to go really crazy. She said that she had a nervous temperament, so it came to her naturally. "I just did this," she said and, raising her eyes to the ceiling, set about the most terrific shrieking and wailing. "Oh, my God, oh, my God, oh, my God, what's happening, you're a murderer!" We were at her house in Arslanköy, and a neighbor stuck her head in the door to see who was being killed. "Nothing's wrong—we're just doing 'Hamlet,'" Ümmiye said. "If only this body would blow away or dissolve, turning into a dewdrop. Or if only God hadn't forbidden suicide!" The neighbor wordlessly withdrew.

The success of "Hamlet" in Arslanköy might attest to Shakespeare's universality. Alternatively, it might attest to certain similarities between Shakespeare's world and a twenty-first-century Anatolian village. Rural Turkey is a place where revenge killings, honor suicides, and blood feuds are real. The question of whether it's better to be alive or dead is a genuine one for village women, many of whom have had the occasion to ask themselves, quite literally, "who would fardels bear, / To grunt and sweat under a weary life." Often in "Hamlet," the farmer's lot is a stand-in for the futility of life. The lines Ümmiye recited, about her body turning into a dewdrop, are from the first soliloquy, "O, that this too solid flesh would melt," which goes on to describe the world as "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable . . . an unweeded garden, / that grows to seed": lines likely to resonate with anyone who does much weeding. In her staging of the graveyard scene—the one about the secret brotherhood of "gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers"—Ümmiye expressed the metaphor neatly by using pumpkins for skulls.

Her production opens with the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father,

played by a woman wearing a white sheet with eyeholes. It's funny, because it looks a bit like Charlie Brown awaiting the Great Pumpkin, but it's also scary, because what's under the sheet is something the women have suffered at first hand, whether you call it tradition, economy, patriarchy, or fate. "Hamlet" and "Woman's Outcry" ask a lot of the same questions. Who is this guy who's ordering me to leave school and come home, to die in the place where I was born: a real father or



a fictive demon? Is my life mine or does it belong to my parents? Is it a blessing or is it a curse?

When Ümmiye first told the school principal that there would be no men in her theatre, he expressed surprise, and asked if she was a feminist. It was a word she had never heard before, but the absence of men is a powerful part of her theatre. It reflects a certain reality about the villages, where the women's emotional lives center on children, animals, and other women, and the men are always elsewhere—loafing, drinking, gambling, working, or dead. In Ümmiye's plays, men are a backdrop, like weather: either they cause problems or they don't. It's the women who perform actions, who reach decisions and change as people. In general, Ümmiye is far less concerned with reforming men than with educating women. Once you educate the women, she says, they'll bring up their sons and daughters as equals, and then the men will come out better anyway.

One day, I accompanied Ümmiye and her group to a remote village, smaller and poorer than Arslanköy, where they were to take part in a women's outreach program run by the Human Resources Foundation of Turkey. Following presentations by a health educator and a psychologist, there was to be a performance of "Free Clinic," a play that Ümmiye wrote, based on a woman she knew,

who wouldn't go to the doctor even when it was free.

The village was in the mountains, about an hour's drive from Mersin. We passed a Coca-Cola plant, a vineyard, a graveyard. I noticed a village called Dalakdere—Spleen Creek—and a row of gigantic shirts flapping on a clothesline. At the beginning of the session, some twenty attendees were given a questionnaire about marriage and pregnancy. A few, unable to read or write, dictated their answers. The women looked physically different from the members of Ümmiye's group, their faces more coppery, their relationship with furniture more cautious. Many had missing or gold teeth. Despite their open expressions and ready smiles, their unhappiness was like an object in the room, to be wrestled with and made the best of. Everyone knew that it was why we were there.

The health educator's talk touched on cervical cancer, the morning-after pill, and I.U.D.s. Projecting a giant diagram of the female reproductive system on the wall, she pointed out the clitoris, explaining that it was the source of female sexual pleasure, and could be thought of as a tiny penis. The psychologist talked about happiness and endorphins, and explained that endorphins were released during sex. "I know you're all taught to do it only when your husbands want," she said. "I know you're all thinking, Why should I create extra work for myself at night, when I could be sleeping?" They had to overcome such thoughts, she said, because deriving pleasure from sex was their right. The women burst out laughing.

The psychologist told them to go home that night and tell their husbands how lucky they were, to have such fantastic wives. She said that they had to love themselves, because you can't feed someone else when you're hungry; and that you could get through to anyone if you found the right language. If you hadn't got through yet, you hadn't found the right language. Men were implied in every sentence, but in such a theoretical way that they started to seem like God, or terrorists—entities who affected you, but whom you would probably never see face to face.

Finally, it was time for "Free Clinic": the story of a doctor who opens a free clinic and is visited by a series of patients with humorous complaints that can't be solved by modern medicine. A thirty-year-old "old maid" comes to the doctor

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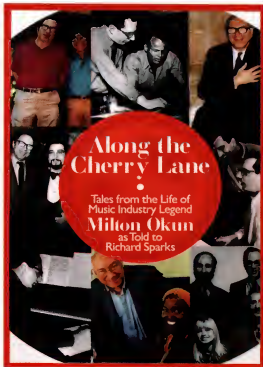
— FRANK GEHRY

"Astonishingly beautiful work."

— MARGARET LOKE
NEW YORK TIMES

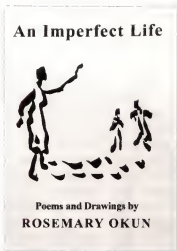
"Wondrous kaleidoscopic panoramas."

— LIESL BRADNER
LOS ANGELES TIMES



Rosemary Okun

Poetry and paintings collected in contemplation of a remarkable journey that led from Depression-era Queens Village to unexpected worlds of experience.



"My favorite late bloomer."

— ED WETSCHLER

"Thumbs up."

— GARRISON KEILLOR

with complaints relating to not being married. "What am I supposed to do about that?" the doctor demands. At first, the women in the audience, who had never seen theatre before, stared at the cast with incredulous expressions. Gradually, they started laughing at the jokes, and answering the rhetorical questions. The pedagogic content of the play lay in the story of the one patient with an actual medical complaint: a pain in her breast. Defying her husband, who considers it shameful, she goes to the doctor, who diagnoses a serious disease: if she had waited any longer, she would have died. After a moment's silence, the local women seemed to recognize this as a happy ending, and applauded loudly.

Until the twentieth century, Turkish women did not perform on the stage. Female roles were played by men or by non-Muslim women, mostly Armenians. The tragic fate of Afife Jale, the first Muslim woman to defy this convention, is still well known. When the teen-age Afife appeared onstage, in 1919, covering for an absent Armenian, her father called her a whore and disowned her. The police raided all her subsequent performances, and the Ministry of the Interior issued a formal decree banning Muslim women from the stage. Atatürk revoked the ban in 1923, but Afife had already succumbed to ignominy, migraine, and morphine addiction. She died, destitute, in a mental hospital, in 1941. Today, the Afife Theatre Awards are among the highest honors in Turkish theatre. Ironically, although "Woman's Outcry" received a mention at the 2007 Afife Awards ceremony, only the high-school principal was cited, and none of the women. Ümmiye wept bitterly. Afife Jale had been an inspiration for her—someone she thought about a lot when she was building her theatre.

In the Turkish theatre, comedy is older than tragedy and melodrama, which became known only in the nineteenth century, through Western examples. Previously, the main dramatic form was the shadow-puppet play, which grew popular in the late sixteenth century. Shadow plays feature two recurring characters, the yokel Karagöz and his refined friend Hacivat, in a series of satiric dialogues and skits. The main "plot," staged as a play within a play, is typically a device bringing Karagöz and Hacivat into contact with a range of

human types: Karagöz and Hacivat enter a poetry contest, and Karagöz wins by beating up all the other poets; they set up shop as scribes, and Karagöz writes crazy letters; or Hacivat puts Karagöz in an insane asylum, and then feels sorry.

During the time I spent with Ümmiye's group, they were touring the Mersin school system with a play called "The Price of Two Oxen," performing up to five times a day. I watched this play many times, and was often reminded of the shadow plays, which used to be on television when I was little. The central plot, about a father who decides to sell his schoolgirl daughter for the price of two oxen, is presented as a play within a play. In one sketch, a city woman comes to Arslanköy, trying to sell the village women tickets to their own theatre, which results in some Karagöz-and-Hacivat-style back talk. Another features a cooking contest, in which three contestants come to blows over whose village has the most authentic *lepe* (a tomato stew with bulgur and potatoes). Last comes the story of the schoolgirl sold for the price of two oxen. This plot, although more serious, still received a relatively lighthearted treatment, with slapstick interludes and a happy ending.

At the last performance before summer vacation, I watched the play from backstage. When I arrived at the school theatre, Seher was adjusting the grotesquely padded bosom and posterior of her "city woman" costume, and Ayfer was bandaging her heel, blistered from ill-fitting men's shoes. As usual in Ümmiye's productions, everyone played five or six roles. Ümmiye, who played three village women, started out the show wearing three near-identical shalwars layered on top of each other, and she furiously peeled down to the next layer between scenes. For her fourth character, she pulled on an enormous purple dress and momentarily got lost inside, unable to find the sleeves or the neck opening. The dress turned out to have a tear, and the other women urged her to change into something else. But Ümmiye said that the tear deepened her character's backstory: "That's the kind of man her husband is. He sells his own daughter, but doesn't give his wife money for clothes."

The others were impressed by her quick thinking. "Let's say that in the play," someone suggested.

"Absolutely not!" Ümmiye declared.

"The perceptive ones will perceive it anyway, and the unperceptive ones are in God's hands."

"Wool Doll," the movie that Ümmiye finished shooting in the spring, is set among the Yörük, some thirty years ago. It tells the story of a mother and daughter, Hatice and Elif, who lead a life of oppression at the hands of Hatice's mother-in-law. (Many of the daughters in Ümmiye's plays are called Elif, which is the Turkish word for the first letter of the Arabic alphabet: to say that someone "doesn't know *elif*" is to say that the person is illiterate.) Ümmiye directed it with the help of Yasin Korkmaz, a twenty-six-year-old Mersin-based filmmaker. The budget, coked out from local government agencies, was less than seventeen thousand dollars. Ümmiye wrote the script as if it were a play, and Yasin edited it for film. The first thing he did was cut out all the male characters. Women with fake mustaches were O.K. in theatre, he said, but not in film. Elif's father is still part of the story, but he never appears onscreen. He's always about to come, or he's just left. Then he dies. Ideally, Yasin told me, a viewer might not notice that the father had never appeared; someone might watch the whole film and not notice that there weren't any men.

The action was supposed to take place in springtime, when the Yörük bring their sheep to pasture in the mountains, but, owing largely to fund-raising troubles, shooting did not begin until the start of 2012, when Arslanköy lay buried under more than ten feet of snow. Anyone who could leave town had done so. Practically, the only souls remaining were the street dogs, the village lunatic, and the mayor. "And the dogs and the mayor mostly stayed indoors," the cinematographer told me.

"What was the lunatic doing?" I asked.

"The same thing as us! Being a lunatic! He would give us this look, like he recognized us."

It had been difficult to cast Elif, since no parents wanted to let their children outside in such weather. Nobody would even let out the goats. It took two days to get together enough goats to shoot a scene with goats in it, and two weeks to find a little girl. In the end, the projected fifteen-day shoot lasted two and a half months. The women slept in Ümmiye's two-room

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house, sharing a single outdoor toilet, while the crew—seven men, at first—occupied a vacant boarding house. They installed a stove and pushed together three beds, and all seven of them squeezed into the three beds. Ümniye gave them a duvet and some sheets, which had originally been intended for Duygu's trousseau. The village imam contributed some blankets from the mosque. The blankets had been used for transporting corpses.

Every night, the crew members slept in dead people's blankets, and every morning they got up to confront a frozen auto transmission. Once, the producer—a semi-professional singer of melancholy Turkish ballads—opened the trunk and leaned in to get something, and the lid came crashing down on his head: the hydraulic mechanism had frozen. A sound technician fell off a ladder and broke something in his back. There was no doctor, and the roads were closed, so he had to be treated by the village bonesetter. Eventually, four crew members departed to the lowlands, leaving only the cinematographer, the producer, and the director. Seher, who was playing Hatice, broke her wrist and had to wear a cast. At least that fit into the story of a woman who had been beaten by her wicked mother-in-law. Meanwhile, the wicked mother-in-law broke her pelvis.

Some actresses got fed up with the cold and quit, meaning that new actresses had to be found and the scenes shot again from scratch. Retakes were often impossible. When you'd once asked a woman to walk across a yard carrying seventy pounds of firewood on her back, sinking to her waist in snow with each step and slowly turning purple, you couldn't ask her to walk across that yard a second time. Even if you could have, she had already left a track in the snow.

In May, I joined Ümniye and her cast and crew for the last day of filming: a scene in which the village teacher and a city official try to persuade Hatice to send Elif to school. We met in Arslanköy, where the cast and crew distributed themselves between my car and Yasin's minivan, and we headed into the mountains.

Clouds hung low and heavy overhead. Farmland scrolled by on all sides, so green it hurt your eyes. As the road wound up into the mountains, the minivan vanished for longer and longer intervals, smaller each time it reappeared. "Don't try to keep up with Yasin—it's hopeless," the cinematographer advised, sitting in the back with his wife and their five-month-old son.

A light rain began to fall. The snow was long gone, but the roads were muddy and pitted. Often, I had a choice of driving either into a ditch or over a boulder. I

usually chose the boulder, which would scrape against the undercarriage of the car. Once, for variety, I tried a ditch and the tires spun alarmingly in the mud, before catching again. We were looking for a pasture with sheep, a lake view, and a Yörük goatskin tent. It wasn't clear to me whether this description referred to a particular place or whether the filmmakers were, like the ancient Yörük themselves, simply wandering the mountains with an eye out for somewhere matching their requirements.

After driving for two hours, we arrived at a grassy ridge overlooking a lake, complete with a pasture, a flock of sheep, even a tent. The clouds had parted, and the pasture shone golden-green in the late-afternoon sun. Unfortunately, the tent was made of blue plastic, and not traditional goatskin, so the crew couldn't shoot inside it. Yasin, who is of Yörük descent, remembered goatskin tents from his childhood, but nobody here used them anymore.

As the crew set up the equipment, I sat on the grass next to Melisa Yıldız, the eight-year-old girl who plays Elif. Dressed in a red knitted vest and a child-sized shalwar, she was occupied in some mysterious way with two rocks and a stick. Her acting was serious, with an undercurrent of fierceness. In one scene, Elif, who has never owned a toy, sees another little girl playing with a doll and is consumed by every kind of emotion, the way children sometimes are. Her mother gives her a hank of black wool swaddled in a blanket. This eponymous "wool doll" looks somewhat like a baby, but has coarse black tufts where its face should be. It's a frightening, almost repulsive object, but Elif cradles it as if it were the most precious thing on earth.

Finally, the equipment was ready. Seher, as Hatice, sat on a rock, and the women playing the schoolteacher and the official stood in front of her. "We've come to see to Elif's education," the teacher said.

"But we're Yörük—we don't have anything," Hatice replied.

"The state has resources for children like Elif."

Every minute or two, something went wrong, and the scene had to be reshot. The boom—a grayish moplike object, partially eaten by goats—cast a shadow on someone's face. The microphone picked up the sound of an airplane flying overhead. The noise could have been filtered

out in the studio, but then the distant sound of croaking frogs would have been lost. Next, Yasin stopped the teacher when she repeated her line about the state having resources for children like Elif.

"Do you realize that you smile every time you say 'state'?" he demanded. "Does the mention of the state fill you with uncontrollable joy, or what?"

"I'm not smiling, I'm squinting," the actress replied. "The sun comes in my eyes. It's not because of the state."

"It might be related," Yasin said. Everyone sighed, thinking about the state.

Ümüye pulled a large housedress out of her bag, clambered up a nearby slope, and stood there, arms outstretched, like Batman, shielding everyone from the sun. Shooting resumed. The city official told Hatice that the state could give Elif a scholarship to a boarding school. Hatice started to cry. "But my daughter is all I have," she said.

"Cut!" Yasin called.

"What is it this time?" the teacher asked.

I heard a small voice say, "An engine." It was Elif. She was right: a moment later, a car came up the winding road.

The actors took the scene from the top. This time, the state was spoken of with appropriate gravity. The sheep stood placidly in the golden light, occasionally clanging their bells. The sky remained free of airplanes, while the frogs continued their whirring chorus. A lonely mother was persuaded to give her daughter up to the powers of state education. As the sun slowly dropped behind the mountains, the company started loading up the cars to head home.

The closest airport to Arslanköy is in Adana, my father's home town. On the way back to Istanbul, I stopped by my grandparents' old apartment, where my aunt now lives. Her younger daughter, Umut, was visiting from Kahramanmaraş, where she studies business administration, a subject that she isn't crazy about. As usual, my aunt brought up her regret that her older daughter and I both live alone and spend all our time working. Umut, a peacekeeper by nature, promised to have ten children to make up for us. She already had names picked out. "Abdullah, Abdurrahim, Selahattin, Feyzullah..." she said pensively.

"What about the girls?" I asked.

"I'm not going to have girls," she said, deadpanning.

Conversation turned to an anti-abortion speech that the Prime Minister had made the week before. "Every abortion is an Uludere," he declared, alluding to a botched airstrike last year that killed more than thirty Kurdish civilians near the eastern city of Uludere. He couldn't understand why people cared more about murdered Kurds than about murdered fetuses.

Back in Istanbul, I kept thinking about the situation of women in Turkey. I started paying more attention to the Turkish papers—to the sensationalistic headlines I used to avoid. In September, my eye was caught by "THE PRICE FOR RAPE: FIVE SHEEP, ONE COW, AND A BRIDE." The story read like a cross between "Woman's Outcry" and "The Price of Two Oxen." E.D., a thirteen-year-old village girl from Erzurum, was forced to marry a relative who had raped and tortured her; in exchange, the relative's parents gave E.D.'s father five sheep and a cow, and his thirteen-year-old sister had to marry E.D.'s brother. (The rapist was later arrested.) That same month, in an echo of "Flowers of Longing," a fifteen-year-old kidnapped bride from a town near Adana hanged herself from a window grille, after her husband kicked her in the stomach and caused a miscarriage.

Ümüye is currently working on a screenplay called "Footless on Her Own Feet." It tells the story of a handicapped girl whose fifty-year-old mother pushes her to school every day in a wheelbarrow. Eventually, she wins a national drawing contest, making a super-realistic picture of herself in the wheelbarrow. With the prize money, she buys a wheelchair. Like the Arslanköy theatre, the girl's drawing uses artistic representation to change the thing represented. By drawing a truthful picture of the humiliating wheelbarrow, she transforms it into a dignified wheelchair—much as a theatre, by representing the injustice of village women's life, might make that life more just. Nabokov once claimed that the inspiration for *Lolita* was an art work produced by an ape in the Jardin des Plantes: a drawing of the bars of its cage. It's a good metaphor for artistic production. What else do we ever draw, besides the bars of our cage, or the wheelbarrow we rode in as crippled children? How else do cages get smashed? How else will we stand on our own feet? ♦

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UTOPIAN FOR BEGINNERS

An amateur linguist loses control of the language he invented.

BY JOSHUA FOER



There are so many ways for speakers of English to see the world. We can glimpse, glance, visualize, view, look, spy, or ogle. Stare, gawk, or gape. Peek, watch, or scrutinize. Each word suggests some subtly different quality: looking implies volition; spying suggests furtiveness; gawking carries an element of social judgment and a sense of surprise. When we try to describe an act of vision, we consider a constellation of available meanings. But if thoughts and words exist on different planes, then expression must always be an act of compromise.

Languages are something of a mess. They evolve over centuries through an unplanned, democratic process that leaves them teeming with irregularities, quirks, and words like "knight." No one who set out to design a form of communication would ever end up with anything like English, Mandarin, or any of the more than six thousand languages spoken today.

"Natural languages are adequate, but that doesn't mean they're optimal," John Quijada, a fifty-four-year-old former employee of the California State Department of Motor Vehicles, told me. In 2004, he published a monograph on the Internet that was titled "Ithkuil: A Philosophical Design for a Hypothetical Language." Written like a linguistics textbook, the fourteen-page Web site ran to almost a hundred and sixty thousand words. It documented the grammar, syntax, and lexicon of a language that Quijada had spent three decades inventing in his spare time. Ithkuil had never been spoken by anyone other than Quijada, and he assumed that it never would be.

In his preface, Quijada wrote that his "greater goal" was "to attempt the creation of what human beings, left to their own devices, would never create naturally, but rather only by conscious intellectual effort: an idealized language whose aim is the highest possible degree

of logic, efficiency, detail, and accuracy in cognitive expression via spoken human language, while minimizing the ambiguity, vagueness, illogic, redundancy, polysmy (multiple meanings) and overall arbitrariness that is seemingly ubiquitous in natural human language."

Ithkuil has two seemingly incompatible ambitions: to be maximally precise but also maximally concise, capable of capturing nearly every thought that a human being could have while doing so in as few sounds as possible. Ideas that could be expressed only as a clunky circumlocution in English can be collapsed into a single word in Ithkuil. A sentence like "On the contrary, I think it may turn out that this rugged mountain range trails off at some point" becomes simply *"Tʻam-mʻloʻi hʻbʻsmaʻrʻpʻtʻuʻkʻtʻoʻx."*

It wasn't long after he released his manuscript on the Internet that a small community of language enthusiasts began to recognize what Quijada, a civil servant without an advanced degree, had accomplished. Ithkuil, one Web site declared, "is a monument to human ingenuity and design." It may be the most complete realization of a quixotic dream that has entranced philosophers for centuries: the creation of a more perfect language.

Ithkuil's first piece of press was a brief mention in 2004 in a Russian popular-science magazine called *Computerra*. An article titled "The Speed of Thought" noted remarkable similarities between Ithkuil and an imaginary language cooked up by the science-fiction writer Robert Heinlein for his novella "Gulf," from 1949. Heinlein's story describes a secret society of geniuses called the New Men who train themselves to think more rapidly and precisely using a language called Speedtalk, which is capable of condensing entire sentences into single words. Using their efficient language to communicate, the New Men plot to take over the

world from the benighted "homo saps."

Soon after the publication of the Russian article, Quijada began to receive a steady stream of letters from e-mail addresses ending in .ru, peppering him with arcane questions and requesting changes to the language to make its words easier to pronounce. Alexey Samons, a Russian software engineer based in Vladivostok, took on the monumental task of translating the Ithkuil Web site into Russian, and before long three Russian Web forums had sprung up to debate the merits and uses of Ithkuil.

At first, Quijada was bewildered by the interest emanating from Russia. "I was a third humbled, a third flattered, and a third intrigued," he told me. "Beyond that, I just wanted to know: who are these people?"

In early 2010, he was forwarded an e-mail in patchy English from a Ukrainian academic named Oleg Bakhtiyarov, who introduced himself as the director of a recently formed institution of higher education in Kiev called the University of Effective Development, and as a leading proponent of a philosophical movement called psychonetics. When Quijada Googled both Bakhtiyarov and psychonetics, he found "a sea of impenetrable jargon" about "efforts to develop the human mind using a mix of Western and Eastern ideas," but nothing that made him suspicious of the group's motivations. The e-mail invited Quijada to participate in a conference titled "Creative Technology: Perspectives and Means of Development," which was to be held that July in Elista, the capital of the Republic of Kalmykia, a small semi-autonomous state in the Russian Federation, situated on the arid western shore of the Caspian Sea.

"From our viewpoint, creation of the Ithkuil language is one of the basic aspects for development of creative thinking," Bakhtiyarov wrote to Quijada. "One



Quijada's invented language has two seemingly incompatible ambitions: to be maximally precise but also maximally concise.

can hardly learn enough about the Ithkuil language from the Russian scientific print editions."

Ithkuil did not emerge from nowhere. Since at least the Middle Ages, philosophers and philologists have dreamed of curing natural languages of their flaws by constructing entirely new idioms according to orderly, logical principles. Inventing new forms of speech is an almost cosmic urge that stems from what the linguist Marina Yaguello, the author of "Lunatic Lovers of Language," calls "an ambivalent love-hate relationship." Language creation is pursued by people who are so in love with what language can do that they hate what it doesn't. "I don't believe any other fantasy has ever been pursued with so much ardor by the human spirit, apart perhaps from the philosopher's stone or the proof of the existence of God; or that any other utopia has caused so much ink to flow, apart perhaps from socialism," she writes.

The first entirely artificial language of which any record survives, *Lingua Ignota*, was created by the twelfth-century German nun and mystic Hildegard von Bingen, who is better known for having composed what may be the earliest surviving morality play. She seems to have used *Lingua Ignota* for some form of mystical communion. All that remains of her language is a short passage and a dictionary of a thousand and twelve words listed in hierarchical order, from the most important (*Aigonz*, God) to the least (*Cauiz*, cricket).

More than nine hundred languages have been invented since *Lingua Ignota*,

and almost all have foundered. "The history of invented languages is, for the most part, a history of failure," Arika Okrent, the author of "In the Land of Invented Languages," writes. Many of the most spectacular flops have been languages, like Ithkuil, that attempt to hold a perfect mirror up to reality. In the seventeenth century, European philosophers like Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Gottfried Leibniz were fascinated by the ways in which natural languages clouded human thought, and wondered if an artificial substitute could more accurately capture the true essence of things. In the previous century, Jesuit missionaries had brought back the first substantial accounts of the Chinese language, and many philosophers were taken with the notion that its characters signified concepts rather than sounds, and that a single ideogram could have the same meaning to people all over East Asia, despite sounding completely different in each tongue. What if, they wondered, you could create a universal written language that could be understood by anyone, a set of "real characters," just as the creation of Arabic numerals had done for counting? "This writing will be a kind of general algebra and calculus of reason, so that, instead of disputing, we can say that 'we calculate,'" Leibniz wrote, in 1679.

Ithkuil's conceptual pedigree can be traced back to Leibniz, Bacon, and Descartes, and especially to a seventeenth-century bishop and polymath, John Wilkins, who tried to actualize their lofty ideals. In his "Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language,"

from 1668, Wilkins laid out a sprawling taxonomic tree that was intended to represent a rational classification of every concept, thing, and action in the universe. Each branch along the tree corresponded to a letter or a syllable, so that assembling a word was simply a matter of tracing a set of forking limbs until you'd arrived on a distant tendril representing the concept you wanted to express. For example, in Wilkins's system, *De* signifies an element, *Deb* is fire, and *Deba* is a flame.

The natural philosopher Robert Hooke was so impressed by Wilkins's language that he published a discourse on pocket watches in it, and proposed that it be made the lingua franca of scientific research. That never happened. The language was simply too burdensome, and it soon vanished into obscurity. But Wilkins's taxonomic-classification scheme, which organized words by meaning rather than alphabetically, was not entirely without use: it was a predecessor of the first modern thesaurus.

By the nineteenth century, the dream of constructing a philosophical language capable of expressing universal truths had given way to the equally ambitious desire to unite the world through a single, easy-to-learn, politically neutral, auxiliary language. Solresol, the creation of a French musician named Jean-François Sudre, was among the first of these universal languages to gain popular attention. It had only seven syllables: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, and Si. Words could be sung, or performed on a violin. Or, since the language could also be translated into the seven colors of the rainbow, sentences could be woven into a textile as a stream of colors.

Esperanto, which was invented in the eighteen-eighties by L. L. Zamenhof, a Jewish doctor from Bialystok, was by far the most successful of a hundred or so universal languages invented in the nineteenth century. At its peak, it had as many as two million speakers, and produced its own rich literature, including more than fifteen thousand books.

Two world wars and the ascent of global English punched an irreparable hole in the Esperantists' dream of creating a universal language. Like every other attempt to undo the tragedy of Babel, Esperanto was ultimately a failure. And yet, by some estimates, Esperanto still has more speakers than six thousand of the languages spoken around the world today,



including approximately a thousand native speakers (among them George Soros) who learned it as their first language.

John Quijada was born in Los Angeles to first-generation Mexican-Americans and grew up in the white-flight suburb of Whittier, where he attended Richard Nixon's junior high school. His father, a Yaqui Indian, was a printer who made the sale signs that hung in grocery-store windows. At night, he painted landscapes.

Quijada's entry into artificial languages was inspired by the utopian politics of Esperanto as well as by the import bin at his local record store, where as a teen-ager, in the nineteen-seventies, he discovered a concept album by the French prog-rock band Magma. All the songs were sung in Kobaïan, a melodic alien language made up by the group's eccentric lead singer, Christian Vander.

"For someone to actually get onstage and unapologetically sing these gargantuan, operatic, epic songs, it made me realize, shit... I've got to do this," Quijada told me. At fifteen, he created Mbozo, the first of his many invented languages, "a relexified generic Romance/Germanic hybrid with African-like phonology." Another one, Pskeo, had a vocabulary that was pounded out randomly on a typewriter.

Quijada enrolled at California State University, Fullerton, when he was eighteen, planning to become a linguistic anthropologist. "I dreamed of becoming the guy who goes into the Amazon and learns a language that no outsider can speak," he said. He spent hours in the library poring over descriptions of the world's most exotic languages, and becoming a connoisseur of strange grammars.

"I had this realization that every individual language does at least one thing better than every other language," he said. For example, the Australian Aboriginal language Guugu Yimithirr doesn't use egocentric coordinates like "left," "right," "in front of," or "behind." Instead, speakers use only the cardinal directions. They don't have left and right legs but north and south legs, which become east and west legs upon turning ninety degrees. Among the Wakashan Indians of the Pacific Northwest, a grammatically correct sentence can't be formed without providing what linguists refer to as "evidentiality," inflecting the verb to indicate whether you are speaking from direct ex-

perience, inference, conjecture, or hearsay.

Inspired by all the unorthodox grammars he had been studying, Quijada began wondering, "What if there were one single language that combined the coolest features from all the world's languages?" Back in his room in his parents' house, he started scribbling notes on an entirely new grammar that would eventually incorporate not only Wakashan evidentiality and Guugu Yimithirr coordinates but also Niger-Kordofanian aspectual systems, the nominal cases of Basque, the fourth-person referent found in several nearly extinct Native American languages, and a dozen other wild ways of forming sentences.

"Originally, I was going to get a Ph.D., when I was

bright-eyed and full of dreams, but reality set in. I was too poor to go to grad school," he told me. "I'd never heard of Pell grants or any other kind of grant, nor did the idea of the government giving people money to go to grad school ever cross my mind as something consistent with reality." At the age of twenty-one, Quijada walked in on his devoutly religious mother describing him as "a good Catholic boy" to his uncle and aunt. "She was totally misrepresenting me," he recalls. "In fact, I was, at the time, agnostic." (Two years later, he declared himself an atheist, and now considers himself a pantheist.) "At that point in my life, it was very important to me that people understand me, and I felt that my parents didn't really understand me," he said. After a subsequent fight, he stormed out the door, and didn't speak to his parents for five years. Unable to afford school on his own, he took a job as a truck driver, and then one at the D.M.V., planning to return to academia once he'd saved enough money.

"For an eight-year period I consciously, through sheer will, did my best to become a different person: that slick, yuppie man-about-town that I always aspired to be in high school," Quijada said. "But the victories were all hollow and short-lived. Pretty soon I'm introspective enough to realize this formula is shallow. At thirty, I renounced that other me and I went back to being me."

Quijada worked his way up to middle management at the D.M.V. in Sacra-

mento, eventually overseeing its Web site. "There were always these incentives to keep grad school on the back burner, and then one day I realized it wasn't even on the stove anymore," he said. Instead, Quijada indulged his interest in academic linguistics by making an annual pilgrimage to Cody's, a legendary bookstore in Berkeley, to pick up the latest titles. In his spare time, he continued to work on Ithkuil, filling



memo pads with notes on a more perfect idiom.

It was on one of those pilgrimages that he discovered "Metaphors We Live By," a seminal book, published in 1980, by the cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, which argues that the way we think is structured by conceptual systems that are largely metaphorical in nature. Life is a journey. Time is money. Argument is war. For better or worse, these figures of speech are profoundly embedded in how we think.

For Quijada, this was a revelation. He imagined that Ithkuil might be able to do what Lakoff and Johnson said natural languages could not: force its speakers to precisely identify what they mean to say. No hemming, no hawing, no hiding true meaning behind jargon and metaphor. By requiring speakers to carefully consider the meaning of their words, he hoped that his analytical language would force many of the subterranean quirks of human cognition to the surface, and free people from the bugs that infect their thinking.

"As time went on, my goal began changing," he told me. "It was no longer about creating a mishmash of cool linguistic features. I started getting all these ideas to make language work more efficiently. I thought, Why don't I just create a means of finishing what all natural languages were unable to finish?"

Quijada wrote Lakoff an e-mail, introducing himself as "a great admirer, reader, and fan," and "humbly inform[ing] you of a project... which you might, time permitting, find of interest." He went on to describe how his understanding of Lakoff's groundbreaking work in cognitive linguistics formed the conceptual basis of Ithkuil, and ended with a personal note of affection. "As someone with a lifelong passion for linguistics who, through personal/financial circumstances did not get to pursue my



"Thanks, kid, but I don't need a trusty sidekick."

dream of [a] career in linguistics, I am grateful [to] you and your colleagues for fighting the battle for me, and I hope I live to see the full flowering of the cognitive revolution in science you have helped to start." Lakoff never responded.

In 1997, when Quijada ran his first Web search for invented languages, he discovered that his strange passion was in fact shared by others. He found a news-group that was populated by amateur linguists from all over the world, who were excitedly conversing about new ways of conversing. "I was like, 'Oh, my God, I'm not alone!'" he recalled.

These linguistic hobbyists call themselves "conlangers" (referring to "constructed language") and hold an occasional conclave called the Language Creation Conference. It was at the second of those conferences, in 2007, on the campus of U.C. Berkeley, that I first met Quijada. Amid two dozen men and seven women dressed in kilts, top hats, and kimonos, the quietly aloof Quijada stuck out like an umlaut in English. Broad-chested and bearded, he sat by himself in the back row of the auditorium, wearing a camouflage trucker hat, a brown polo shirt, and cargo pants. "John commands respect," I was told by David Peterson, the president of the Language Creation Society and the

inventor of Dothraki, the language spoken by a race of pseudo-Mongol nomadic warriors in the HBO series "Game of Thrones." (Dothraki is now heard by more people each week than Yiddish, Navajo, Inuit, Basque, and Welsh combined.) In 2008, Peterson awarded Ithkuil the Smiley Award for the best invented language of the year. "Few have or, I'm sure, ever will produce anything as complete and compelling as Ithkuil," he proclaimed in the award presentation.

Quijada appreciated the award, but he generally keeps a low profile in the conlanging world. On the Facebook page devoted to Ithkuil, where fans post translations of the Lord's Prayer, and offer "Ithkuil Wisdom of the Day," Quijada lurks but never comments.

When I met him, Quijada was preparing to deliver a talk on the topic of phonoaesthetics, that hard-to-pin-down quality which gives a language its personality and makes even the most argumentative Italian sound operatic, the most romantic German sound angry, and Yankee English sound like a honking horn. He asked rhetorical questions of the audience, such as "Should my language include diphthongs?" while offering advice like "If you put front vowels in your language, nobody will take it seriously as a language of Orcs." His speaking style was confident

and professorial in a way that might have seemed arrogant were it not for his frequent self-deprecation.

At the previous year's conference, where Quijada had lectured on Lakoff's theory of metaphor, he had begun his presentation by speaking sentences in six languages created by conference attendees. For most of them, it was the first time they had heard their language spoken by another human being.

Unlike earlier philosophers and idealists, who believed that their languages could perfect humanity, modern conlangers tend to create their languages primarily as a hobby and a form of self-expression. Jim Henry, a retired software developer from Stockbridge, Georgia, keeps a diary and prays in his constructed language, *giä-zym-byn*. If there is a god paying attention, he is the language's only other speaker.

Many conlanging projects begin with a simple premise that violates the inherited conventions of linguistics in some new way. Aeo uses only vowels. Kelen has no verbs. Toki Pona, a language inspired by Taoist ideals, was designed to test how simple a language could be. It has just a hundred and twenty-three words and fourteen basic sound units. Brithenig is an answer to the question of what English might have sounded like as a Romance language, if vulgar Latin had taken root on the British Isles. Láadan, a feminist language developed in the early nineteen-eighties, includes words like *raditidin*, defined as a "non-holiday, a time allegedly a holiday but actually so much a burden because of work and preparations that it is a dreaded occasion; especially when there are too many guests and none of them help."

Invented languages have often been created in tandem with entire invented universes, and most conlangers come to their craft by way of fantasy and science fiction. J. R. R. Tolkien, who called conlanging his "secret vice," maintained that he created the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy for the primary purpose of giving his invented languages, Quenya, Sindarin, and Khuzdul, a universe in which they could be spoken. And arguably the most commercially successful invented language of all time is Klingon, which has its own translation of "Hamlet" and a dictionary that has sold more than three hundred thousand copies.

The discipline of linguistics has a his-

tory of giving uncredentialed amateurs a seat at the table. Indeed, one of the foundational linguistic theories of the twentieth century, which came to be called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, was based in part on the work of Benjamin Whorf, an inspector for the Hartford Fire Insurance company. Whorf never got an advanced degree, but he took graduate classes in his free time with the anthropologist and linguist Edward Sapir, in the nineteen-thirties, and he devoted his leisure hours to the study of Native American languages.

Neither Sapir nor Whorf formulated a definitive version of the hypothesis that bears their names, but in general the theory argues that the language we speak actually shapes our experience of reality. Speakers of different languages think differently. Stronger versions of the hypothesis go even further than this, to suggest that language constrains the set of possible thoughts that we can have. In 1955, a sociologist and science-fiction writer named James Cooke Brown decided he would test the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis by creating a "culturally neutral" "model language" that might recondition its speakers' brains.

Brown based the grammar for his ten-thousand-word language, called Loglan, on the rules of formal predicate logic used by analytical philosophers. He hoped that, by training research subjects to speak Loglan, he might turn them into more logical thinkers. If we could change how we think by changing how we speak, then the radical possibility existed of creating a new human condition.

Brown never succeeded in creating more logical thinkers, and today the stronger versions of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis have "sunk into . . . disrepute among respectable linguists," as Guy Deutscher writes, in "Through the Looking Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages." But, as Deutscher points out, there is evidence to support the less radical assertion that the particular language we speak influences how we perceive the world. For example, speakers of gendered languages, like Spanish, in which all nouns are either masculine or feminine, actually seem to think about objects differently depending on whether the language treats them as masculine or feminine; those conceptual differences are maintained even when they learn a second, non-gendered language, like English.

Quijada would endorse a weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and the conlanging community includes some of the last true believers in a strong version. After all, if our thoughts are necessarily imprisoned by language, as Sapir-Whorf suggests, then the only sensible course of action is to build a roomier, more lavish jail cell with all the amenities an inmate could possibly desire—a new language that could make possible new ways of thinking.

If you imagine all the possible notions, ideas, beliefs, and statements that a human mind could ever express, Ithkuil provides a precise set of coordinates for pinpointing any of those thoughts. The final version of Ithkuil, which Quijada published in 2011, has twenty-two grammatical categories for verbs, compared with the six—tense, aspect, person, number, mood, and voice—that exist in English. Eighteen hundred distinct suffixes further refine a speaker's intent. Through a process of laborious conjugation that would befuddle even the most competent Latin grammarian, Ithkuil requires a speaker to home in on the exact idea he

means to express, and attempts to remove any possibility for vagueness.

In the original version of Ithkuil, the word *Ithkuil* literally means "hypothetical representation of a language," which reflects the fact that it was never meant to be casually spoken. It was an attempt to demonstrate what language could be, not what it should be. "The idea of Ithkuil is to convey deeper levels of human cognition than are usually conveyed in human language," Quijada told me. For example, the phrase "characteristic of a single component among the synergistic amalgamation of things" is a single adjective: *oicašitik*.

If that word looks as though it required extreme acts of tonsillar gymnastics to produce, it is because no sound or syllable is wasted in Ithkuil. Every language has its own phonemic inventory, or library of sounds, from which a speaker can string together words. Consonant-poor Hawaiian has just thirteen phonemes. English has around forty-two, depending on dialect. In order to pack as much meaning as possible into each word, Ithkuil has fifty-eight phonemes. The original version of the language included a repertoire of

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMOM



grunts, wheezes, and hacks that are borrowed from some of the world's most obscure tongues. One particular hard-to-make clicklike sound, a voiceless uvular ejective affricate, has been found in only a few other languages, including the Caucasian language Ubykh, whose last native speaker died in 1992.

On a warm afternoon in mid-July, I visited Quijada's modest three-bedroom home in suburban Sacramento, where he lives with his wife, Carol Barry, also a retired civil servant. One set of bookshelves was lined with dictionaries of Yoruba, Latvian, Basque, Hausa, and more than three dozen other languages. Another was packed two layers deep with science-fiction paperbacks.

Quijada turned on some Congolese soukous music, one of many genres of world music of which he considers himself an aficionado, and pulled out a copy of an unpublished science-fiction novel he co-wrote with his identical twin, Paul, called "Beyond Antimony," about the philosophical implications of quantum theory. (Quijada and his twin communicated with each other in a private language when they were young, a phenomenon that is surprisingly common, and has its own name: cryptophasia.) In the novel, Ithkuil is used as a "para-linguistic interface for an array of quantum computers that are being used to create emergent consciousness."

He opened a closet and pulled out a plastic tub filled with reams of graph paper documenting early versions of the Ithkuil script and twenty-year-old sentence conjugations handwritten in marker on a mishmash of folded notepads. "I worked on this in fits and starts," he said, looking at the mass of documents. "It was very much dependent on whether I was dating anyone at the time. This isn't exactly something you discuss on a first or second date."

Human interactions are governed by a set of implicit codes that can sometimes seem frustratingly opaque, and whose misreading can quickly put you on the outside looking in. Irony, metaphor, ambiguity: these are the ingenious instruments that allow us to mean more than we say. But in Ithkuil ambiguity is quashed in the interest of making all that is implicit explicit. An ironic statement is tagged with the verbal affix "kçc." Hyperbolic

statements are inflected by the letter "m."

"I wanted to use Ithkuil to show how you would discuss philosophy and emotional states transparently," Quijada said. To attempt to translate a thought into Ithkuil requires investigating a spectrum of subtle variations in meaning that are not recorded in any natural language. You cannot express a thought without first considering all the neighboring thoughts that it is not. Though words in Ithkuil may sound like a hacking cough, they have an inherent and unavoidable depth. "It's the ideal language for political and philosophical debate—any forum where people hide their intent or obfuscate behind language," Quijada continued. "Ithkuil makes you say what you mean and mean what you say."

In Ithkuil, the difference between glimpsing, glancing, and gawking is the mere flick of a vowel. Each of these distinctions is expressed simply as a conjugation of the root word for vision. Hunched over the dining-room table, Quijada showed me how he would translate "gawk" into Ithkuil. First, though, since words in Ithkuil are assembled from individual atoms of meaning, he had to engage in some introspection about what exactly he meant to say.

For fifteen minutes, he flipped backward and forward through his thick spiral-bound manuscript, scratching his head, pondering each of the word's aspects, as he packed the verb with all of gawking's many connotations. As he assembled the evolving word from its constituent meanings, he scribbled its pieces on a notepad. He added the "second degree of the affix for expectation of outcome" to suggest an element of surprise that is more than mere unpreparedness but less than outright shock, and the "third degree of the affix for contextual appropriateness" to suggest an element of impropriety that is less than scandalous but more than simply eyebrow-raising. As he rapped his pen against the notepad, he paged through his manuscript in search of the third pattern of the first stem of the root for "shock" to suggest a "non-volitional physiological response," and then, after several moments of contemplation, he decided that gawking required the use of the "resultative format" to suggest "an event which occurs in conjunction with the conflated sense but is also caused by it." He eventually emerged with a tiny

word that hardly rolled off the tongue: *apq'lexasiu*. He spoke the first clacking syllable aloud a couple of times before deciding that he had the pronunciation right, and then wrote it down in the script he had invented for printed Ithkuil:



"Now imagine a culture where gawking is not only culturally appropriate but laudatory. Ithkuil would have a word for that, too," Quijada explained. Having grammatically systematized all the many aspects that turn seeing into gawking, he showed me how he could apply those same grammatical transformations to any verb, so that one could open a door or run to the store or throw a ball with all of the same nuanced inflections of impropriety, surprise, and shock that transform a mere look into a gawk.

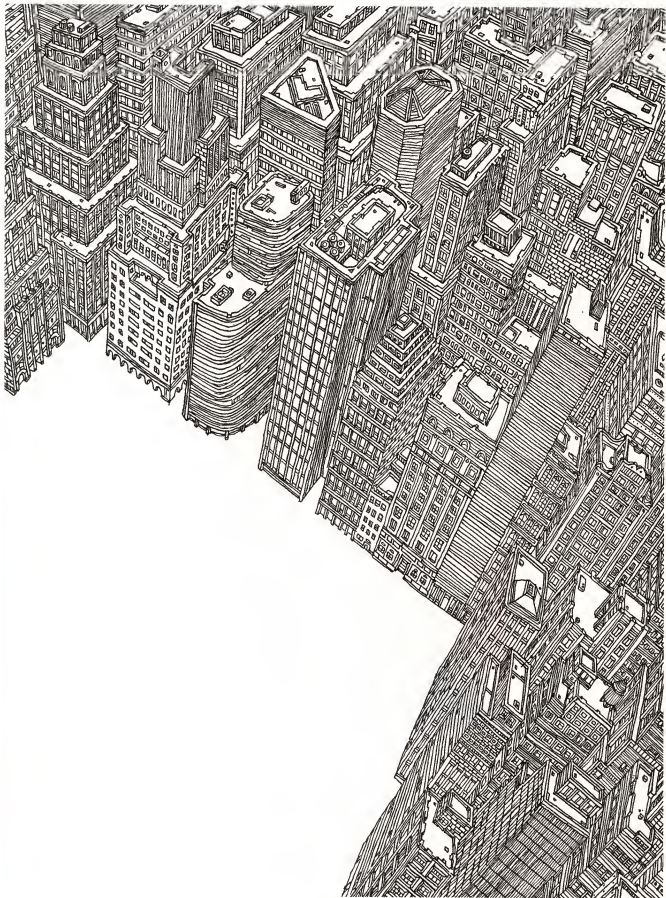
"You can make up words by the millions to describe concepts that have never existed in any language before," he said.

I asked him if he could come up with an entirely new concept on the spot, one for which there was no word in any existing language. He thought about it for a moment.

"Well, no language, as far as I know, has a single word for that chin-stroking moment you get, often accompanied by a frown on your face, when someone expresses an idea that you've never thought of and you have a moment of suddenly seeing possibilities you never saw before." He paused, as if leafing through a mental dictionary. "In Ithkuil, it's *aiſtal*."

In 2010, Quijada found himself in a position he'd long sought to avoid. In order to get time off to attend the conference in Kalmukia, he was forced to disclose to his boss and co-workers, some of whom had known him for more than two decades, that he had been concealing a hobby that had consumed his nights, weekends, and lunch breaks ever since college.

"People at work now held me in some sort of state of half awe, because this guy obviously has more going on in his head than being a manager at this dopey state agency, and half in contempt, because I've now proved myself to be beyond whatever state of geekery they might have previously thought about me," Quijada said. "You're a what? A con man?" "No, boss, a conlanger." He was being sent halfway



around the world on an all-expenses-paid trip, sponsored by a foreign government, to take part in a conference whose docket of speakers included philosophers, sociologists, economists, biologists, a logician, and a Buddhist monk. Not only had Quijada never been to Kalmykia; he'd never heard of it before.

To the extent that it's known at all, Kalmykia is notable for two things: for being the only majority-Buddhist state west of the Ural Mountains, and for having an eccentric former President, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, an oligarch-turned-politician, spend millions of dollars of his own fortune turning a dusty, forgotten corner of the Russian steppe into the chess capital of the world. Ilyumzhinov claims to have been abducted from his Moscow apartment, in 1997, by extraterrestrials, who gave him a tour of the galaxy and taught him that chess came from outer space.

Upon landing in Elista, Quijada was greeted by an interpreter and whisked off to Chess City, a community of middle-class California-style town houses built on the outskirts of town to host the 1998 World Chess Championships. There he met a student, a young woman, who informed him that a group of students at the University of Effective Development, in Kiev, had been studying Ithkuil intensively for the past two years, and saw it as an integral part of a psychonetics training program that they were developing. Another student told him that he and his friends regarded him as "a legend." Quijada still had no real idea what psychonetics was, or why the University of Effective Development might be interested in it. He was speechless.

"You tend to think by age fifty-one that you've pretty much seen everything life can throw at you," he wrote later. "But from that moment on, John Q. was through the looking glass."

Quijada opened his presentation the next morning by showing an image of Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2," a seminal work of Cubist painting, which captures a figure in motion with abstract lines and planes. It's not an easy work to describe in any language, but Quijada wanted to demonstrate how one would attempt the task in Ithkuil.



RAPTURE

I want to be awake
when the world ends.
I want to be my friend

who rose to an empty
house, even his grandmother
& her worn cross gone

& thought it was the rapture,
that he hadn't crossed over.
Let me rip my shirt

as he did & tear into the street
hollering. Let me hear
only my blood beat this morning

He began with several of the language's root words: -QV- for person, -GV- for clothing, -TN- for an implement that counters gravity, and -GW- for ambulation, and showed how to transform those roots through each of the language's twenty-two grammatical categories to arrive at the six-word sentence "*Aukkras èqutta ogvèula tnou'elkwa pal-lsi augwaikstùlnambu*," which translates roughly to "An imaginary representation of a nude woman in the midst of descending a staircase in a step-by-step series of tightly integrated ambulatory bodily movements which combine into a three-dimensional wake behind her, forming a timeless, emergent whole to be considered intellectually, emotionally, and aesthetically."

That evening, following a series of interviews with the Kalmykian press, there was a get-together of conferences in the town house in Chess City where Oleg Bakhtiyarov, the professor responsible for Quijada's invitation to Kalmykia, was

staying. The psychoneticists talked into the night about their experiments in "deconcentration of attention" and other techniques of spiritual self-development. But the more Quijada pressed them for an explanation of their philosophy the more elusive it seemed. Above all, he couldn't quite figure out why they were so obsessed with his language.

"I never did get a handle on what these

techniques really were," Quijada recalled. He chalked up his misunderstandings to poor translation, and decided that it would be impolite to voice too much skepticism. As the evening unfolded, he found himself perched barefoot and cross-legged on a sofa, with a group of young Russian students gathered on the rug at his feet.

"I was surrounded by all these people hanging on my every word. It was intoxicating—especially for a loner like me," Quijada said. "For one day, I got to play as an academic. I got to live this fantasy where I took the other path in the garden. I got to see what it would have been like if I had gone to graduate school and become a professional linguist. The fates of the universe tore open a window to show me what my life could have been. That night, I went back to my room, took a shower, and burst into tears."

In May, 2011, I accompanied Quijada on a return trip to the former Soviet Union, this time to attend "SingEngineering: Ithkuil & Psychonetics," a two-day conference in Kiev that had been organized by the University of Effective Development. The befuddling title of the conference seemed to be a mistranslation of the Russian *znakotekhnologiya*, which makes only marginally better sense when rendered as "Sign Engineering."

We were picked up at the airport by Alla Vishneva, an attractive brunette with streaks of bleached blond in her hair, with whom Quijada had been exchanging

in the rain before the dawn—
no one on the line.
Later, when they return,

let those I love who left
have only gone to the store,
running errands, this errant

unebbing life. After,
let what I've torn—
the myself I mourn—

be mended & start
over, like a scar,
or star.

—Kevin Young

e-mails and phone calls intermittently for the past several months. Vishneva, a former professor of Ukrainian at Rivne State Humanitarian University and a student of psychonetics, was the founder of an Ithkuil study group in Kiev.

Quijada, who had been wearing a pair of Coke-bottle glasses and toting a cane to compensate for a leg injury, sized up her metallic silver boots and figure-hugging bluejeans and seemed taken aback. "What is a beautiful woman like you doing teaching Ithkuil?" he asked.

Vishneva chuckled and returned the compliment in stilted English: "Ithkuil is beautiful. It's a very pure and logically constructed language."

Quijada turned to me in the back seat of the car, visibly giddy. "It's one thing for another conlanger to call your work beautiful, but for someone halfway around the world with a million better things to do to say that—you've got to pinch yourself. It makes it seem like thirty years of slaving away might have been worth it."

"We think that when a person learns Ithkuil his brain works faster," Vishneva told him, in Russian. She spoke through a translator, as neither she nor Quijada was yet fluent in their shared language.

"With Ithkuil, you always have to be reflecting on yourself. Using Ithkuil, we can see things that exist but don't have names, in the same way that Mendeleev's periodic table showed gaps where we knew elements must be that had yet to be discovered."

"She really understands my language!"

Quijada exclaimed. He leaned across the headrest and told Vishneva, who was sitting in the front passenger seat, "I don't know if you're a saint or crazy."

The conference was held in a Soviet-era high-school classroom, the walls of which were covered in chalkboards and forest-green Naugahyde. Most of the attendees were either students or faculty of the University of Effective Development, but none of them, Quijada noted, looked like the typical language geeks he knew from the conlanguing community. For one thing, they were more physically imposing; many of the men had shaved heads.

Bakhtiyarov, who had just flown in from a conference in Egypt, delivered the opening remarks. Wiry, with short gray hair and a dark mustache, he carried himself with a studied calmness that came across at times as diffidence. He explained to me later that he had begun his career as a medical student at the Kiev Medical Institute, but was expelled for distributing "provocative literature" on campus. In the late sixties, the K.G.B. labelled him "politically unreliable," and sent him to prison for two years. When he got out, he switched to biology, and eventually became a psychologist. In the nineteen-eighties, despite his history of radicalism, he ended up working for the Soviet government on a project to develop a set of stress-management techniques for cosmonauts, soldiers, and other individuals in states of psychological extremis. Those techniques form the basis of psychonetics, a quasi-mystical, quasi-philosophical self-

help movement whose goal is to develop "technologies of human consciousness."

After I asked several times for a demonstration of these technologies, Bakhtiyarov pulled up a piece of software on his laptop. Half a dozen colored circles were slowly bouncing around the screen like billiard balls, shooting off in new directions as they collided with each other. Bakhtiyarov instructed us to try to look at the screen as a unified gestalt, instead of focussing on any individual ball. "Your attention creates subjects and objects as it filters a stream of data," he said. "With deconcentration, we have no objects, just a feeling of everything in a single integrated whole." After a few moments, the balls all went black, and we were supposed to keep track of their original colors as they continued to bounce around the screen. It was, of course, impossible. But, according to Bakhtiyarov, it is through exercises like this that a psychoneticist can begin to access deeper layers of intuition about the world.

Psychoneticists may be the world's strongest believers in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. For them, language is a barrier that gets in the way of a holistic perception of the universe. "A psychoneticist must have nothing unconscious. Everything must be conscious," Bakhtiyarov explained. "This is the same goal as Ithkuil. Human beings have a linguistic essence, but we are in a transitional stage to some other essence. We can defeat and conquer language." He sees Ithkuil as a tool to bring all of one's unconscious thoughts and feelings under conscious control.

In addition to the University of Effective Development in Kiev, there are psychonetics laboratories in Kharkov, Odessa, Zaporozh, Minsk, Elista, St. Petersburg, Alma-Ata, Krasnoyarsk, and Moscow, where practitioners try to find ways to access "deep layers of consciousness" to become "more effective in business, increase willpower, creative skills, problem solving, and leadership." At the conference, Bakhtiyarov announced that, beginning the following semester, Ithkuil would be made a mandatory part of the school's curriculum in Kiev and at satellite campuses in three other cities.

One of the conferees, a graduate of the University of Effective Development named Gennadiy Overchenko, explained that he had used psychonetics to develop skills in a variety of disciplines where he

previously had no expertise, from chess to cooking to gouache painting. He later told me that, after half an hour of meditation, he was able to sight-read Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" despite being a novice pianist. "In the past two years, I have never fallen (including on ice), and have not dropped or broken anything," he continued.

Another conferee, Marina Balioura, described how, while under the influence of psychonetic techniques, she could simultaneously write two different sentences with each of her hands. A young lawyer named Ilya Petichenko recounted an exercise that uses Ithkuil to "go into the field of pure meanings." His wife, Victoria, explained how psychonetics helped her "just bounce off the floor with creativity."

I glanced over at Quijada, who seemed to be amazed at how well the presenters grasped the fundamentals of his language, and yet increasingly flustered by their weirdness. The group had gathered to discuss linguistic transparency, and yet the more the psychoneticists described their interest in Quijada's language the more opaque it all seemed.

A gaunt man with closely cropped hair sat on one side of the room and recorded the proceedings on a camcorder. He slouched in his chair, showing only intermittent interest in the proceedings, until he came to the front of the room to address the conference. He introduced himself as Igor Garkavenko. Rather than hand his camcorder off to someone in the audience, he continued to hold on to it while he spoke, pointing it at me and our translator.

As he spoke, the translator whispered in my ear; Garkavenko spoke so fast and monotonously that it was difficult to keep up. He mentioned a recent stint in prison, described reading Bakhtiyarov's book, "Active Consciousness," in his jail cell every day, and the transformational effect that psychonetics had had on his political and philosophical consciousness.

Near the end of his speech, the translator stopped speaking. The color had fled his cheeks. "Do you realize who this guy is?" he whispered to me. "This guy is, like, the No. 2 terrorist in Ukraine."

A quick Google from our seats pulled up a news report with a photograph of the man who was standing at the podium. Garkavenko, it turned out, was the founder of a militant far-right Russian na-

tionalist organization called the Ukrainian People's Revolutionary Army. In 1997, he was sent to prison for nine years for firebombing the offices of several Ukrainian political and cultural organizations, as well as the Israeli cultural center in Kharkov.

I turned to my translator. "What in the world is this guy doing at a linguistics conference?"

I leaned over to Quijada and told him what I had just read. We looked around the room at the collection of young men and women in attendance, and were suddenly struck by a question that probably ought to have dawned on us earlier: What were any of these people doing here?

After the conference wrapped up, Quijada and I met over a cup of coffee to debrief, and to try to figure out what we had just taken part in. We ran Internet searches on Bakhtiyarov and Garkavenko, and, with the help of Google Translate, we decoded some of their writings in Russian, including a trail of Garkavenko's anti-Semitic blogposts. "A considerable proportion of the populace knows the role of the State of Israel, and the elites related to it, in those disastrous processes that the peoples of the former Soviet Union are now living in," one of his essays proclaimed. I read that one aloud to Quijada, who twiddled anxiously with the strap of his luggage, a look of devastation on his face.

We discovered that Bakhtiyarov, in addition to his work on psychonetics, moonlights in politics. In 1994, he joined the leadership of the Party of Slavonic Unity, a short-lived ultra-nationalist movement whose goal was the reunification of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus into a Slavic confederation that would also include Poles, Czechs, Serbs, Slovaks, and Bulgarians.

In interviews, Bakhtiyarov talks of developing "intellectual special forces" that can bring about the "reestablishment of a greater power" in greater Russia, and give birth to a "new race... that can really be called superhuman."

An intellectual elite capable of seeing through the tissue of lies to the underlying essence of things needs a language capable of expressing their new way of thinking. Like Heinlein's fictional secret society of geniuses, who train themselves in Speedtalk in order to think faster and more clearly, Bakhtiyarov and the psycho-

neticists believe that an Ithkuil training regimen has the potential to reshape human consciousness and help them "solve problems faster." Though he denies that psychonetics is a political project, it's hard to uncouple Bakhtiyarov's dream of creating a Slavic superstate from his dream of creating a Slavic superman—perhaps one who speaks a disciplined, transparent language such as Ithkuil.

"When I get home, the first thing I'm doing is drafting a letter to Dr. Bakhtiyarov saying I don't want to have anything else to do with psychonetics," a dispirited Quijada told me. "What if, God forbid, this were labelled as pseudoscience, or some sort of cult? I wouldn't want to be complicit in that. To find out that, when all is said and done, I'm ultimately a pawn for these misguided Nietzschean whatever-they-are... it just turns me off."

Quijada and I weren't the only ones who had been using Google. Garkavenko blogged his account of the conference on Live Journal and posted the video he shot of me on YouTube.

"At the conference, there was one person... with an interpreter," he wrote on his blog. "To put it simply: he had Pentagon written all over him. I don't know, it was plain and simple, a stereotypical caricature of the face of a government agent.... When he took the initiative and asked a question, it was always exactly the thing that a government agent would blantly ask about."

Garkavenko had also noticed the moment when my translator and I realized who he was. "He changed right before our eyes.... It became clear that he had met me on the Internet. Afterward, I found out whom fate had brought. Joshua Foer... the well-known journalist... a descendant of Odessa Jews who had once fled to the West, at an inopportune time for them. Of course, they were confident in their intuitions. And how could they over there ignore a phenomenon like Oleg Bakhtiyarov's project?"

Releasing a newborn language into the wild, where it can evolve and be corrupted in the mouths of others, has consistently proved difficult for language creators. More than once, it has been accompanied by the same sense of destructive disappointment that the Biblical God experienced after he released his own perfect creations into the world and dis-

covered that they weren't so perfect after all. Charles Bliss, a survivor of Buchenwald and the inventor of the pictographic language Blissymbolics, became unhinged when he learned that teachers were modifying his language to make it a tool for children with cerebral palsy to learn English. Volapük, a language created in the nineteenth century by a German Catholic priest named Johann Martin Schleyer, once had two hundred and eighty clubs around the world and more speakers than Esperanto. But its audience collapsed when Schleyer refused to allow anyone other than himself to coin new words.

Toward the end of the Kiev conference, one of the professors from the University of Effective Development told Quijada that she couldn't understand why he had no interest in building a movement of Ithkuil speakers and students. "Your language is taking on a life of its own," she told him. "You should become a part of it."

"It's not my passion," Quijada told her politely. "It was a twenty-five-year itch that I needed to scratch. I scratched it. If others can pick it up and run with it, that's wonderful, but I've accomplished what I wanted to accomplish. You've shown me that you understand my work far better than I would have thought other persons could understand it. Indeed, perhaps you understand its potential better than I do."

A few months after returning from Kiev, Quijada finally had the opportunity to meet George Lakoff, at his home in Berkeley. Lakoff was laid out on his sofa after a back operation that kept him from going in to work. At my urging, he had agreed to see Quijada.

As we walked up the front-yard path to the house, Quijada was as adrenalized as I'd ever seen him. "This is one more step in the adventure, I guess," he said.

Lakoff's wife opened the door and escorted us to the living room.

"Why me?" Lakoff asked Quijada, from his spot on the couch.

"Because you're my hero," he said.

Lakoff, who is seventy-one, bearded, and, like Quijada, broadly built, seemed to have read a fair portion of the Ithkuil manuscript and familiarized himself with the language's nuances.

"There are a whole lot of questions I have about this," he told Quijada, and then explained how he felt Quijada had



"You got better-looking as you got older—up to a point."

misread his work on metaphor. "Metaphors don't just show up in language," he said. "The metaphor isn't in the word, it's in the idea," and it can't be wished away with grammar.

"For me, as a linguist looking at this, I have to say, 'O.K., this isn't going to be used.' It has an assumption of efficiency that really isn't efficient, given how the brain works. It misses the metaphor stuff. But the parts that are successful are really nontrivial. This may be an impossible language," he said. "But if you think of it as a conceptual-art project I think it's fascinating."

In the months that I'd known him, Quijada had compared himself to a painter several times, and spoken often of the impulse to create, but this was the first time I'd heard him or anyone refer to Ithkuil simply as a work of art. And yet that description of his project seemed to sit better with Quijada than any other set of words that anyone else had used to describe it.

"If linguistics is the best window into the mind that we have, why wouldn't you want to manipulate it for artistic purposes?" he said to Lakoff.

"The beauty of this for me is that you went through the world's languages and collected all these features, as if to say, Look at what human language is capable

of. I say, bless you!" Lakoff told him. The meeting lasted almost five hours.

When Quijada returned home, he made a final set of tweaks to the Ithkuil grammar, and declared his thirty-four-year project complete. Then he self-published a definitive, four-hundred-and-thirty-nine-page description of the language. Though he dedicated the book to Alla Vishneva, he politely declined Bakhtiyarov's invitation to speak at another conference, in Moscow.

Once the deflation of Kiev and the excitement of the meeting with Lakoff had worn off, I wrote to Quijada and asked if there might be a brief phrase in Ithkuil to summarize the journey that he and his language have taken during the past year. He sent me a sentence: "Eipkalindböll te uvölilpa ipçatörza üxt ri'ekçuòbòs abzeik'ouxhtoü eqarpañ dbai'eickòbüm öt eužmachünän xba'ek'extimmalt te q'oc ityatuit'ani." "I am privileged to have had the rare experience of having what I think of as a hobby propel me to faraway places where one encounters new ideas along with new cultures and new peoples generous in their hospitality and respect, leading me to humble introspection and a new appreciation for the human spirit and the wonders of the world."

Of course, that's not quite right, either. ♦



The view from the deck of the Nordic Odyssey (with the tugboat the Vengery in the foreground), have diminished in recent years, the Northeast Passage—for centuries an obsession of explorers—

A REPORTER AT LARGE

POLAR EXPRESS

A journey through the melting Arctic, with sixty-odd thousand tons of iron ore.

BY KEITH GESSEN



as the ship sailed from Murmansk, in Russia, to Huanghua, in China, in July. Because the extent and thickness of ice during the Arctic summer could soon become an everyday part of merchant shipping. By the middle of this century, it may be possible to traverse the North Pole in a canoe.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVIDE MONTELEONE

The ice-class bulk carrier Nordic Odyssey docked at the port of Murmansk, Russia, just after six in the morning on July 5, 2012. It had a green deck and a red hull, and was seven hundred and thirty-eight feet long, a hundred and five feet wide, and a hundred and twenty feet from top to bottom; empty, it weighed fourteen thousand tons. It was an eighty-story building turned on its side and made to float. The Odyssey had come to pick up sixty-five thousand tons of iron ore and take it to China via the Northern Sea Route—through the ice of the Arctic seas and then down through the Bering Strait.

Murmansk, which rises along one bank of a fjord thirty miles south of the Barents Sea, is the world's largest city north of the Arctic Circle, and yet as soon as a visitor got past harbor security, at the gate, the city disappeared. The pier was covered by huge mounds of coal and iron ore. Train cars kept pulling in with more; tall yellow cranes dipped into them and deposited the ore onto the mounds, and then the train cars pulled out again. It was as if Russia were coughing up her insides. The cranes' grabs could barely squeeze into the rail cars. The deep, rumbling sounds of steel on steel echoed in the quiet of the fjord.

The Odyssey is owned by a Danish shipping company called Nordic Bulk. In 2010, the company was asked to get a load of ore from Norway to China. The

normal route would be either south through the Suez Canal or even farther south, around the Cape of Good Hope, but the Suez route would take you by the coast of Somalia, home to the world's most enterprising pirates, and the Cape Hope route would take too long. Mads Petersen, the co-chairman of Nordic Bulk, wondered if there was another way. As it happened, the shortest route from Norway to China was through the Arctic. "And I thought, Maybe the Northern Sea Route has opened up, because of global warming," Petersen said, recounting his thought process two years later, in Murmansk. He is just past thirty, gregarious, and big—six feet two, and two hundred and sixty pounds. I said, "You started going to the Arctic because you read an article about global warming?"

Petersen shook his head. "In Denmark, you do not 'read an article' about global warming," he said. "You hear about it, all the time."

Petersen contacted Rosatomflot, the state company that owns Russia's six nuclear icebreakers (the largest such fleet in the world), and made a deal to send his cargo through the Arctic with an icebreaker escort. The price was three hundred thousand dollars, but the projected savings in fuel and time would make up for it, and then some. Moreover, it was an adventure, and it even had a patriotic appeal. Vitus Bering, the man who, in 1728, discovered the strait be-

tween Russia and America, was a Dane.

While in port, the Odyssey was less an intripid ship and more of a floating warehouse. A metal gangway connected it to the pier and was watched at all hours by two members of the crew. It was important that nothing extra be allowed to get on board (drugs, for example, or tanks) but that all the proper things (maps, food, cigarettes) did. Most important of all was the iron ore. It had to be loaded as efficiently as possible, in the ship's seven deep cargo holds, but also as evenly as possible: nothing can take a ship down faster than its cargo, improperly loaded. There was also the depth of the water to keep in mind. Fully loaded, the Odyssey would have a draft—the plumb distance from the waterline to the keel—of forty-three feet; at the pier, the water, at low tide, was forty-two feet. Thus the ship had to load up at high tide and then leave.

Petersen spent two days in Murmansk and then flew back to Copenhagen. The responsibility for loading the Odyssey fell on its chief mate, Vadim Zakharchenko. He was a short, broad-shouldered man with red hair and freckles; in his dark jumpsuit, he resembled a small bear. A native of the old port city of Odessa, he spoke Russian with a surprising Yiddish lilt—a legacy, he said, of his many Jewish classmates. On the early morning of July 9th, the Odyssey's last day in port, he was in a foul mood. The stevedores had told him that they weren't going to get to sixty-five thousand tons of iron ore in time. In fact, Zakharchenko reported to Igor Shkrebko, the captain of the Odyssey, "They say we'll be lucky to reach sixty-four." At current shipping prices, a thousand fewer tons would put Nordic Bulk down between twenty and thirty thousand dollars: an inauspicious start to the trip.

The captain was a tall, thin man, still youthful in his mid-forties, with curly, graying hair and black eyes. During the stay at Murmansk, his young wife had come up from their home town of Sevastopol to visit; while most of the crew stayed on board, the Shkrebkos had walked around town and taken lots of photographs. In any case, cargo loading was the chief mate's job. "Akh!" Zakharchenko finally said. "They'll throw what they throw!"

For the rest of the morning, he scampered among the cranes and dockworkers, balancing two conflicting impera-



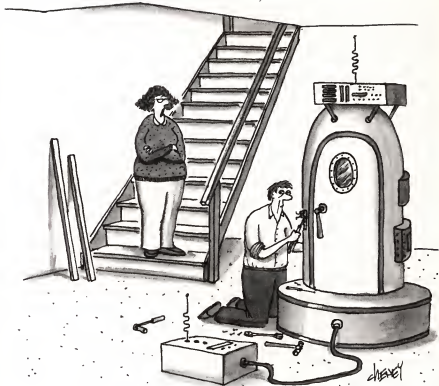
"A low-level person who doesn't mean anything will see you now."

tives: that the cranes load the ship in record speed, and that the hills of iron ore remain evenly distributed throughout the holds. The tall yellow cranes worked with urgency, picking up six or seven tons of ore from the mounds piled on the dock, swinging over the cargo holds, then releasing the ore with a swoosh. As a light rain began to fall, Zakharchenko several times climbed down a rope ladder to the lee side of the ship to check how far it had descended into the water. Each centimetre represented sixty-seven tons; incredibly, this was the only way to measure how much ore the *Odyssey* had taken on.

High tide was at noon, and the ship could not stay at the pier any longer. At eleven-thirty, the cranes stopped loading, and fifteen minutes later all was done. According to an eyeball measurement of the ship's displacement, taken by both Zakharchenko and a surveyor hired by the Russian company that was shipping the ore, and a somewhat hurried calculation of the water density in the harbor, the *Odyssey* was now filled with sixty-seven thousand five hundred and nineteen tons of ore: two and a half thousand tons more than the target. The stevedores had underestimated themselves. Those stevedores now ran down to the dock and removed the ship's thick ropes from the bollards; then three small tugboats came alongside the *Odyssey*, two to push and one to pull the ship into the harbor. That night, as the sun dipped toward the horizon (though it would not set), we entered the Barents Sea. You could tell it was the sea because right away our ship, despite now weighing more than eighty thousand tons, started listing from side to side atop the waves.

Ahead of us, to the north and to the east, the ice was melting. This was normal. At its maximum extent, in mid-March, the ice covers the entire Arctic Ocean and most of its marginal seas for about fifteen million square kilometres, twice the land area of the continental United States. During its minimum extent, around mid-September, the ice cover traditionally shrinks to about half this size.

In recent years, it has been shrinking by much more than half. In September of 2007, the ice shrank to 4.3 million square kilometres, the lowest extent in recorded history. In subsequent years, it reached its second-, third-, and fourth-lowest-ever



"And just what are you planning to do with your stupid trans-dimensional one-way escape pod?"

extents. The thickness of the ice—more difficult to measure but also more telling—is also decreasing, from an average thickness of twelve feet in 1980 to half that two decades later. The primary cause of this decline is warmer air temperature in the Arctic, an area that has been more affected by global warming than any other place on earth.

The estimates vary, but scientists agree that at some point this century the minimum extent, at the end of the summer season, will reach zero. At that point, you'll be able to cross the North Pole in a canoe. But it won't be just you and your canoe, because the resource grabs have already begun. Denmark and Canada are engaged in a territorial dispute over Hans Island, which a recent congressional research report describes as a "tiny, barren piece of rock" between Greenland and Canada's Ellesmere Island, because territorial claims will lead to resource rights. Similarly, Russia has filed a claim with the United Nations that the Lomonosov Ridge, which spans the Arctic underwater from the coast of Siberia to Ellesmere Island, gives Russia rights to the sea above it, including the North Pole. All this is being done in anticipation

of a thaw. Oil companies, armed with new technology and lured by less menacing winter conditions, will be able to establish drilling platforms in latitudes that were previously off limits, and shipping companies will be able to save time and money through the Arctic shortcut. Shell has already announced plans to begin drilling exploratory wells off northern Alaska. Last year, Rosneft, Russia's biggest oil company, signed a joint-venture agreement with ExxonMobil to proceed with oil exploration in the Kara Sea—once called Mare Glaciale, the "ice sea." Meanwhile, the *Odyssey's* trip was a test case for the proposition that the Northern Sea Route, formerly known as the Northeast Passage, could be reliably traversed.

The water of the Barents was a handsome dark blue, the sky was clear, and the temperature outside, though gradually dropping, was a balmy fifty degrees. Captain Shkrebko set our heading east for the southern tip of the archipelago Novaya Zemlya; this put the ship at a better angle to the waves, and it stopped rocking. We were proceeding at an un-

impressive speed, thirteen knots, but then again we never stopped. Three bridge crews of two men each, an officer and an able seaman, carried out four-hour shifts throughout the day and night.

The Odyssey had a permanent complement of just twenty-three men. The senior officers—captain, chief engineer, chief mate—were Ukrainian, as were the electrician and the second engineer; the rest of the crew was Filipino. The Ukrainians spoke Russian among themselves, while the Filipinos spoke Tagalog. Across the cultures, they spoke a rudimentary marine English. Otherwise, their contacts were limited. In addition to this permanent crew, there was a Russian “ice adviser,” or pilot, named Eduard Cherepanov, who had been sailing these waters for almost twenty years.

Relations aboard the Odyssey were hierarchical and traditional. The captain, a native of the old naval city of Sevastopol, was the absolute authority. He was therefore a little isolated, socially, from the crew, and seemed grateful for the presence of Cherepanov, who had served as a captain and was therefore his social equal, and, more important, not someone with whom discipline needed to be maintained.

The chief mate, Zakharchenko, occupied an ambiguous position. On the one hand, he was in charge of much of the day-to-day operation of the ship, and he was the only one on board who knew as much about ships and the sea as the captain. On the other hand, he was entirely at the mercy of the captain, not only on the ship but professionally: because the chief mate has no independent contact with the home office, the only way he'll ever get a captaincy is if he's actively promoted by his captain. Zakharchenko was a soft touch. He tried to present a stern face to the crew, but he stuttered when he was nervous, and when he wasn't nervous he couldn't help but make a joke of some kind. As he liked to say, “Am I from Odessa, or not?”

The two most senior Filipino crew members were Felimon Recana, the second mate, and Eliseo Carpon, the third mate. Both men were in their fifties, almost a decade older than Captain Shkrebo and Zakharchenko. The second mate was handsome and sarcastic, a born cynic; the third mate was gregarious and enthusiastic. I once saw him jump up and cry “Yes!” after

winning a game of Spider Solitaire on the computer in the crew rec room.

Life on board the ship is mostly confined to the “accommodation,” a yellow, five-story metal building that rises from the stern. The bridge is on the top floor; the bottom floor contains locker rooms for the men as they prepare to go on deck. The men's living quarters are spread through the second, third, and fourth floors. Each man has his own cabin, about the size of a college dorm room, with a small bathroom and shower. Everything is secured so that it doesn't go flying around the room during a storm. This battening down takes some getting used to. It's easy enough to understand why the mini-fridge is strapped to a hook in the wall and the back of the bathroom mirror has little compartments for your toothbrush and shaving cream, but it took me almost a week to realize that the drawers under my bed, which wouldn't open when I tried them, were not ornamental, as I'd decided, but just extremely sticky. I was able to move my clothes out of my desk.

Most of the men were on six-month contracts, with monthly pay ranging from eleven hundred dollars, for the mess boys, to around ten thousand dollars, for the captain and the chief engineer—pretty good money in the Philippines and Ukraine. The contract is the standard unit of experience in the trade; one says “My last contract” rather than “My last ship.” A six-month contract may include as few as ten port calls and as many as several dozen. These reprieves are short, and growing ever shorter as improved port technology gets ships in and out faster, but the men are grateful for them, and can recite the price of girls in many ports across the world. The crew members had all received phone calls from their crewing agency in early April and taken over the ship from its previous crew, at the Irish port of Aughinish, in mid-May. So far, they'd brought soybeans from Quebec to Hamburg, and coal from Latvia to Antwerp. None of them had been through the Arctic before.

To be aboard a ship is to be constantly aware of everything that can go wrong. A ship can run into another ship—hard to believe when you look at how wide the ocean is, a little easier to believe once you consider that it takes the Odyssey almost two miles to



THE MELTING ARCTIC

In the summer, the polar ice cap is now about half the size it was a century ago. In July of 1912, the ice cap extended to most of Russia's northern coastline; this July, much of the southern Arctic Ocean was free of ice.





"I need a night off, Shifty—I'm moll'd out."

come to a complete stop. A ship can be overtaken by pirates: Captain Shkrebbko narrowly escaped pirates in the Gulf of Aden in 2007 (he was saved when an American military helicopter responded to his distress call), while the *Odyssey's* fourth engineer was on a ship that was hijacked off the coast of Kenya in late 2009 and held hostage for forty-three days. A ship can be compromised by its cargo, which may shift, forcing the ship off balance, or create other problems—Zakharchenko had with him an alarming color brochure called "How to Monitor Coal Cargoes from Indonesia," which warned that Indonesian coal had a tendency to catch on fire. The *Odyssey's* electrician, Dmitry Yemalienenko, had a short cell-phone video of a ship listing very hard to starboard in the Black Sea; it was carrying plywood,

which had shifted en route. "Then what happened?" I asked.

"It sank," Yemalienenko said.

Then there was the danger of running into something beneath the waterline. To avoid this, the ship carried a full set of hydrographic charts, most of them from the British Admiralty. But the charts are never complete, and the telex machine on the bridge kept up a steady patter of warnings. When we headed out into the Barents, there was a broken signal at 69°40'N, 32°09'E, a shipwreck at 69°52', 35°16', nighttime artillery fire at 70°15', 33°38', plus some fishing nets.

Finally, there is the ice. The books on the bridge of the *Odyssey*—arranged on shelves behind the navigation table, with little wood braces to keep them from falling out in heavy seas—were all in agreement on the subject of the ice.

"It is very easy and extremely dangerous to underestimate the hardness of ice," "The Mariner's Handbook" cautioned. "Ice fields consisting of thick broken floes, especially those that bear signs of erosion by the sea on their upper surface, should be avoided. . . . Do not enter ice if a longer but ice-free route is available." "The Guide to Navigating Through the Northern Sea Route," published in English in 1996 by the Russian Ministry of Defense, put the matter more dramatically: "Any attempt at independent, at vessel's own risk, transiting the NSR, without possessing and using full information, and without using all means of support, is doomed to failure."

This seemed harsh. But the ice-strengthened cruise ship *Explorer* sank off the coast of Antarctica in 2007 after hitting ice. The shrimp trawler *B.C.M. Atlantic* sank near Labrador after hitting ice in 2000. Were the *Odyssey* to start sinking, there was a freefall lifeboat hanging three stories up and at a forty-five-degree angle from the stern, but Vadim Zakharchenko said he would rather drown; the boat is raised so far up that its impact against the water could knock out your teeth.

Seamen don't like to talk about the things that can go wrong at sea, but they love to talk about the things that go wrong on land. As we approached Novaya Zemlya, the Ukrainians started joking about radioactivity. The Soviets had turned Novaya Zemlya into a nuclear-testing site; while they were at it, they used the coast around it as a dumping ground for reactors from decommissioned nuclear submarines. The largest nuclear bomb in history, the Tsar Bomba, had been detonated here, in 1961. "Chernobyl is nothing compared to this!" Vadim announced.

On the evening of July 11th, we entered a thirty-mile-wide strait between the southern end of Novaya Zemlya and Vaygach Island, at the entrance to the Kara Sea. The southern portion of the Barents that we had just been through is open to warm Gulf Stream currents, and it's rarely frozen even in winter. The Kara Sea is a different story. For years, no one could penetrate it. In the fifteen-nineties, the Dutch explorer Willem Barents was

repeatedly foiled by the ice at the Kara Gates and decided at last to head north and seek a way around Novaya Zemlya. This was not a good idea. His ship became trapped in ice, and the crew was forced to abandon it and spend the winter on land. One evening in October, the sun set and did not come back up again for three months. The men battled cold, scurvy, and hungry polar bears. "In Nova Zembla," the chronicler of the journey wrote, "there groweth neither leaves nor grasse, nor any beasts that eat grasse or leaves live therein, but such beasts as eat fleshe, as bears and foxes." When the warm weather came, in June, the crew headed for the Russian mainland. Some survived; Barents died of scurvy on the way.

The failed Barents expedition took place during the late-sixteenth-century Dutch ascendancy on the seas. It followed earlier English attempts to traverse the passage earlier in the century, and preceded some failed Russian ones. To be fair to these early explorers, their boats were made of wood, their maps were wildly inaccurate, they didn't know what a vitamin was, and they had no satellites to help them navigate the ice. Instructions from the London-based Russia Company to its early employees were notably vague: "And when you come to Vaygach, we would have you to get sight of the maine land... which is over against the south part of the same island, and from thence, with Gods permission, to passe eastwards alongst the same coasts, keeping it alwayes in your sight... untill you come to the country of Cathay, or the dominion of that mightie emperor." This was the state of the art in 1580. The dream was to reach China and its untold riches. But, after enough men had disappeared into the ice never to return, the Dutch and the English decided it would be easier to go to war with Spain and Portugal for the right to use the route around the south of Africa, and the Arctic, for a while, was forgotten.

For the next nine hundred and fifty miles, the Russian mainland stretched upward into the Arctic, forcing us to head northeast through the Kara Sea. Only when we reached Cape Chelyuskin, at almost 78°N the northernmost point in Asia, could we turn southeast. And the farther north we got the colder it became. Out on deck, though the tem-

perature was still above freezing, a chill northerly wind blew in our faces.

On the morning of July 13th, we crossed the seventy-fifth parallel; we had passed by the Yamal Peninsula, home to most of Russia's natural gas, and the mighty Ob and Yenisey Rivers. In recent years, these rivers have been discharging more fresh water into the Arctic seas, as warmer temperatures increase over-all precipitation in the Arctic water basin. Scientists anticipate that there will soon be more soil in the water, as the permafrost layer, underground, melts and the riverbanks begin to slide down. The Kara Sea was clear and cool, the air temperature thirty-nine degrees, the water temperature forty-one; not swimming weather, but nothing to make ice from, either.

Late in the morning, we entered a stretch of fog. We could see as far as the bow of the ship and not an inch farther. The captain turned on our foghorn. It emitted a deep, loud wail every two minutes, to let anyone in front of us know that we were coming. But the ice pilot thought this precaution was goofy. "We don't really need that thing, you know," he said to the captain. "There's no one else out here." He was right. That afternoon, we were in radio contact with the two ships that were joining us in our convoy through the Northern Sea Route; one was a hundred and fifty miles ahead of us, the other a hundred miles behind. That afternoon, too, on our radar, we saw the only other boats outside our convoy that we'd encounter on the Northern Sea Route: the Geofizik and the Geolog Dmitriy Nalivkin—the ExxonMobil/Rosneft seismic expedition, searching for oil.

The next morning, we finally saw it: ice. It floated in isolated islands along the water. The islands were ten or fifteen feet in diameter, with a layer of snow on top, which protruded from the water by about a foot; beneath the water, you could see the ice, a few feet down and widening toward the bottom before narrowing again, like a teapot. These ice floes were on their way out of this world: there were still two months left in the melting season, and already the floes looked the worse for wear. The water lapped at their corners. In the middle of some of the floes, little green pools,

known as "melt ponds," had formed in the snow. Unlike the white snow cover, which reflected sunlight back into the atmosphere, the puddles absorbed it. The sunlight was slowly drilling a hole in the ice under the puddles; if it managed to create a hole all the way down to the water, the water would have a toehold inside the ice to begin its destructive work.

They were a strange sight, these islands of ice, in the middle of the sea. The lookout on the Barents expedition, when he first encountered the ice, exclaimed that he saw swans. Our crew was equally amazed. Many of the younger men were immediately on deck with digital cameras and cell phones. Eliseo, the third mate, who'd been going to sea for twenty-five years, was especially moved. "My first time," he said.

A few hours later, we reached the rendezvous point with the icebreakers: the Vaygach, beige and black, and the Yamal, red and black. They were not as long as the Nordic Odyssey, but they were stouter and, with their nuclear-powered engines, significantly more forceful. They had shallow-angled bows that allowed them to climb atop ice and crush it with their weight. A shallow bow must have felt insufficiently aggressive to the builders of the Yamal, however, for they had painted on it a set of big red jaws.

A Norwegian tanker, the Marilee, its deck covered with a tangle of pipes by means of which it kept its various liquids separate, was also waiting for us at the rendezvous point, and in the middle of the afternoon a five-hundred-and-seventy-foot Russian cargo ship, the Kapitän Danilkin, caught up with us as well. Off we went into the ice. We were now approaching the tip of the Taymyr Peninsula, Cape Chelyuskin, named for the explorer who reached this spot by land in 1742. Halfway between Murmansk, to the west, and the Bering Strait, to the east, it was one of the most obscure places in the world; Severnaya Zemlya, a large archipelago just thirty miles north of the cape, was not discovered until 1913—the last major piece of undiscovered land on earth. The ice we'd seen earlier was scattered and melting; this ice was thicker and packed closer together. We followed the Yamal at a distance of about half a mile; the Vaygach was behind us, followed by the Marilee and the Kapitän Danilkin. We were soon joined



Charts on a table on the navigation bridge. The crew included a temporary "ice pilot," with particular experience in Arctic waters.

by a small red tugboat, the Vengery, which took its position directly behind the Odyssey.

Captain Shkrebko, who until this point had mostly been taking photos with an expensive camera, walking around in sneakers, and generally looking more like a club tennis pro than like a sea captain, was now fully engaged, giving minute instructions to Able Seaman Ronald Segovia, who was at the wheel. The captain and the ice pilot had both got up in the middle of the night, at the first sight of the ice, and were still up, twenty hours later. Their job was to maintain radio contact with the icebreaker ahead and help the young helmsman maneuver the ship in unfamiliar conditions. Shkrebko and Cherepanov also had to decide how fast to go. There was a booklet on the bridge, from the

Central Marine Research and Design Institute, in St. Petersburg, indicating the proper speed for an ice-class vessel through varying thicknesses of ice; the thicker the ice, the slower the ship should travel, so as not to damage its hull. But determining the actual thickness of the ice was an inexact science, and the ice pilot's contribution was primarily a counsel to remain calm.

"Take it down to six?" the captain would ask the pilot as they looked at one of the booklets, referring to six knots, or about half-speed.

"Eight is probably fine here," the ice pilot would say, and we'd go to eight.

I put on a winter coat and hat and walked to the bow. It was a cold day and overcast. About twenty feet above the water, I watched the ship smash into the ice. Even after getting worked over by

the Yamal, some of the ice pieces were big, six or seven feet thick and thirty or forty feet across. But we were bigger. Sometimes the ice simply cracked in two as soon as we collided with it, and then fell away to our port and starboard. At other times it remained intact, trying to stop us, sometimes climbing the bow as we pushed it backward. Occasionally a large piece would seem to have some traction, but the Odyssey was just too strong. Eventually the ice floes slithered off to the side. After we'd made it through the first ice field, the captain went down to the bow, too, and looked over the side. "Not even a scratch," he reported. He did not go down there again.

Over the next few hours, and then over the next eight days, we saw an incredible variety of ice. Some of the bits were just a few feet across, some were



The sailors' dining room, which is separate from the officers' dining room. In life aboard ship, boredom is an ever-present problem.

hundreds of feet; some were gray and even black, covered in grime, the way snow gets in New York after a few days. Some of the ice floes bobbed up and down in our wake; others remained proudly immobile. A few times, the ice was so thick, and the icebreaker broke it so cleanly, that it came up again on its side, looking like a giant slice of cake, with green and blue layers separated by thin lines of white. Sometimes a smashed ice floe would be submerged beneath the surface and then come up, the water rolling off its back as off a slowly rising whale.

It took the *Odyssey* nearly twenty-four hours to round Cape Chelyuskin and enter the Laptev Sea. The sun still hadn't set since we'd left Murmansk, and much of the time the skies were relatively clear.

But the air temperature was now at freezing, and toward the middle of the afternoon, on July 15th, it began to snow.

As the trip progressed, I found myself spending more time with the chief mate, Vadim. Of all the men on board, he seemed the most ambivalent about his job, and the most philosophical. "This sun-filled prison," he said of the bridge. "A wonderful people," he said of the Jews of Odessa. "They've all left. And I alone in that whole city to carry on their memory."

Vadim's mother was a schoolteacher and his father an electrical engineer on a ship in the Soviet merchant marine. Young Vadim worshipped and feared his father. "He would come home from sea and you could just feel the aggression in him," Vadim said. "Then after two weeks he'd go back to normal." Seamen were a privileged category of Soviet citizen in

that they could travel abroad, and Vadim, too, wanted to travel. He got his wish. In more than twenty years at sea, he has worked on passenger ships, refrigerator ships (reefers), oil tankers, and all kinds of bulk carriers, or bulkers. He likes to talk about music, soccer, and citizens of Odessa who have become wealthy, but his favorite topic is how sick he is of the sea. "You think it's beautiful," he would say as the sun came out from behind a cloud and shone on the blue clear water, lightly chopped by the wind. "I used to think it was beautiful, too. Now I can't even look at it."

Vadim has other regrets about his career. "I became chief mate too late," he told me. "I was thirty-five. At that age, some people are already captains." Vadim was a captain just once in his career. He had joined the crew of a Greek bulker in

South Korea, which set out for Seattle to get yellow corn. Before the trip began, he had a bad dream: he was naked, and when he looked down he saw that he was a woman, not a man. A bad omen. A week into the trip, the captain said he had a pain in his side. By the morning, he had died. Vadim was now acting captain of the ship, and he called the home office, in Athens. "The Greeks asked me if I had a captain's license," he said. "If I'd had one, I think they would have told me to keep going. Imagine showing up in the U.S. with a body on board? I'd have spent weeks filling out paperwork. I'd probably still be there!" In the event, Vadim did not have a captain's license. The ship returned to South Korea, a new captain flew in, and Vadim went back to being chief mate.

Vadim has a lightning-quick mind for arithmetic and a fondness for record-keeping. He has a folder on his laptop called "1,001 Songs," containing his favorite songs from all over the world, with not a single artist repeated. He keeps statistics, independently of the newspapers, for the Odessa soccer club, the Chernomorski, and he sometimes has occasion, when he's on land, to send a correction to the papers when they've made a mistake. He has a file, called "History," in which

he lists every country he's ever visited, every major canal he's passed through, and every time he's crossed the equator. Vadim is forty-three, divorced, and has a daughter in college. He keeps a color-coded chart, month by month since 1993, of when he's been home in Odessa, and when he's been at sea. The chart indicates that he's been at sea for twelve of his last twenty birthdays. In most of his photos from home, the chief mate is drunk.

On July 15th, in the Laptev Sea, Vadim was in mid-sentence on the bridge when he suddenly stopped, walked over to a pair of binoculars, and looked through them north-northeast. "Iceberg," he said. I thought he was kidding. The third mate, Eliseo, had taken to saying "Titanic" to me every time we saw a more or less healthy piece of ice. But Vadim wasn't kidding. About eight miles from us, well out of our way but within sight, a giant piece of ice sat regally in the water. It had most likely calved off one of the glaciers on Severnaya Zemlya. Vadim estimated that it was about sixty-five feet high and perhaps three hundred feet long.

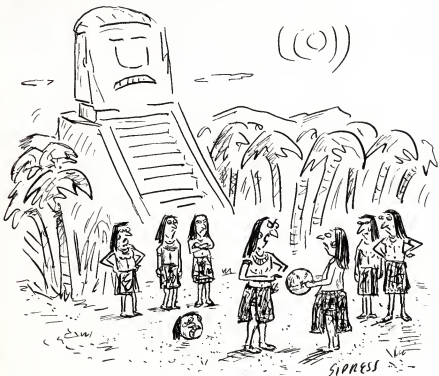
We continued on our way through the Laptev Sea. In September, 2007,

when the ice receded to what was then its all-time minimum, the Northern Sea Route was still very difficult to navigate, because a three-hundred-mile belt of drift ice remained bunched up in the Laptev. But now the Laptev was nearly empty of ice.

Each day, we received reports on weather and ice conditions in the Arctic, but aside from that our information was limited. We had no Internet access aboard the ship. The captain was able to send and receive e-mails from a computer on the bridge, and others were theoretically allowed to send e-mails from the same computer, with the captain printing out the replies and slipping them under your door, but none of the crew members seemed to avail themselves of this service. Contact with home was confined to the satellite phone in the ship's office, which charged fifty cents a minute. "It's hard without the Internet," Vadim said. "You don't know who got blown up, who got assassinated. A few years ago, I came home and it was months before I found out that Yeltsin had died!"

Some of the crew wanted news of their families and called home weekly; some did not. The second mate, Felimon, claimed that he never did. "If I call from sea and there is problem," he said, "and then I call from port—it is same problem. There is nothing I can do." Able Seaman Edison Vocal told a story about a friend from a previous contract. The friend had received word from home that his wife was seeing someone else. For several weeks, he kept himself from calling—what was he going to do, out at sea?—but finally he called. His daughter answered. Mommy had a guest over, she said, and couldn't come to the phone. Edison's friend became depressed. He stopped eating. Then he jumped overboard. The ship went back and found him, but that was the sort of thing that could happen if you called home.

The crew entertained themselves as best they could. At 6 P.M. each day, four of the Filipinos would play doubles Ping-Pong in the gym. The level of play was erratic. The mess boy, Reynaldo Dalinao, the youngest crew member, always tried to slam the ball, with mixed success. Ordinary Seaman Michael Arboleda, whose day job mostly consisted of washing the ship and who was tall and broad-



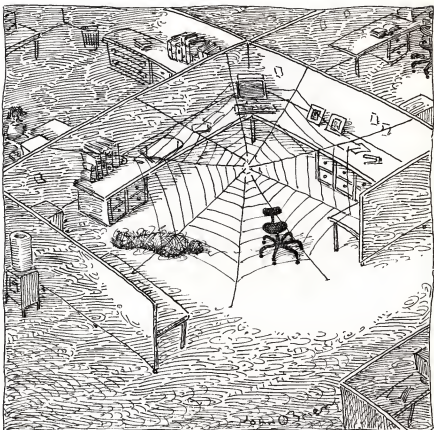
"I don't care if it's more bouncy—it threatens the integrity of the game."

shouldered and always wore a basketball jersey with his last name on it (his cousin is a professional basketball player in Manila), tended to hit the ball casually into the net, then laugh. The star player was the third mate, Eliseo, who used a strange, possibly experimental grip, placed the ball wherever he pleased, and waited to pull you out of position. This was unquestionably the most fun I ever saw the crew have.

Mealtimes were at 7 A.M., noon, and 5 P.M. All the Filipino crew who weren't on shift would fill up the crew mess tables and eat and talk—though they rarely tarried over their meals, sometimes wandering over to the TV at the other end of the room if they had time to spare. The officers' dining room was different. Reynaldo, the mess boy, set out everyone's food—usually some form of cabbage soup, followed by fried beef and potatoes—and covered it with plastic wrap. The Ukrainians came and scarfed it down when they could, almost always alone. At most times of the day, you could find four or five plastic-covered meals sitting on the tables in the officers' dining room, growing cold.

In the evenings, a group would gather in the crew rec room to watch an American action film, though the Manny Pacquiao–Timothy Bradley fight, which ended in a controversial decision for Bradley, was also popular. The crew had learned about the decision in Hamburg, then bought a DVD in Antwerp. The third mate had seen the fight about six or seven times, by his estimate, whereas Able Seaman Generoso Juan had seen it “every time,” which he believed was closer to a dozen. The Ukrainians, meanwhile, all had their own laptops and tended to stay in their cabins in the evenings and watch Russian television serials that they had downloaded from the Internet before shipping out.

At 75 degrees latitude, the circumference of the earth is a quarter what it is at the equator, which means that one's time zone changes every two hundred and sixty-nine miles. On the *Odyssey*, the ship's time was at the discretion of the captain, and in a sense it didn't much matter what the local time was, since the sun never set. But the captain figured that it would be better to adjust the clocks gradually, by increments of an hour, than to



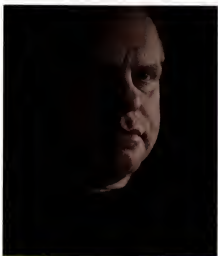
move them ahead eight hours when we finally reached the Bering Strait. And so one slowly lost a sense of what time it “actually” was, somewhere else. The ship's time was the only time that mattered.

On July 17th, as we passed north of the New Siberian Islands (where nineteenth-century explorers had found well-preserved mammoth remains) and entered the East Siberian Sea, our captain turned forty-five. Toward evening, the Ukrainians and the ice pilot huddled into the captain's cabin for a small party. The captain opened some pickled vegetables he'd picked up in Murmansk, and Reynaldo brought up some bread and cheese from the galley. The ship's ban on alcohol was temporarily lifted, and we drank to the captain's health.

The captain came from a long line of captains. His grandfather had been a captain in the N.K.V.D., and his father was a captain in the Soviet merchant marine. Young Igor began his career on a reefer, off Antarctica, as Soviet fishermen harpooned their last whale before the international ban on whaling went into effect, in 1986. After the Soviet

Union fell apart, he'd remained with the old company. Those years were full of adventures, as Ukraine sold off its inheritance from the U.S.S.R. While still in the employ of a reefer company, Shkrebo towed an old warship to Turkey. A few months later, the authorities called him in: “They said, ‘You sold a warship to Turkey.’ I sold a warship to Turkey? I was hired to tug a ship to Turkey. Here's the contract. It went out of Sevastopol port in full view of your military, with all the proper papers and permissions and everything. I sold it?” Eventually, there was nothing left to sell. Shkrebo began his first contract with an international shipping company in 2000. He was given his first command in 2006.

The other men had similar stories, which they told when the captain—who didn't necessarily like other people talking when he was talking—was distracted. They had been to hundreds of ports among them; they had met women from all over the world, had wooed them or paid them; they liked working for better money, for an international company, and with a mixed crew. (With an all-Soviet



Vadim Zakharchenko (top left), the chief mate aboard the Nordic Odyssey. The chief mate is in charge of much of the ship's day-to-day operation, and of the loading and unloading of cargo. Above, Able Seaman Edison Vocal.

crew, there was always too much drinking. "At first, it's fine, but then guys start hitting each other in the face," Vadim said. "Then they wake up and can't remember who hit who in the face. It causes problems.") But they missed the Soviet merchant marine. The pay was worse but the friendships lasted longer. And the crews were co-ed. There was never any trouble finding companionship aboard the Shota Rustaveli or the Maxim Gorky.

Later that night, I went down to the galley to get a drink of water. Someone was watching an adult movie in the crew rec room. On my way back up, I ran into Vadim coming out of the ship's office. The crew's satellite phone was in there, but whom would he have been calling? He was estranged from his ex-wife, and I knew he didn't have a steady girlfriend. The next day, he admitted that he'd been calling a friend in Odessa to learn the latest scores of his beloved soccer team, the Chernomorts.

The Russians, led by Vitus Bering, mapped the contours of the Northeast Passage, largely by land, in the seventeen-thirties and forties, but it was only in 1878-79 that anyone sailed the entire route, and it wasn't until the summer of 1932 that a ship, the icebreaker *Sibiryakov*, made the navigation in one season. Steel and coal, not high atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, were what initially conquered the ice.

But what was happening now was unprecedented. When Mads Petersen, the co-chairman of Nordic Bulk, first sent his cargo of iron ore from Norway through the Arctic, in 2010, he had done so in September, the month when the ice is at its minimum; he did so again in 2011. Never before had he sent a ship in July. But we were making decent time. And when the *Odyssey* came back through here, in August, there would be less ice. When it came back again in September, there would be hardly any ice at all.

Yet Mads Petersen was the only person I talked to in the Arctic who believed in man-made global warming. The deputy head of Rosatomflot smiled when I asked him about it ("This stuff is cyclical"), and so did my friend Vadim, who thought that the theory of global warming was a Western hoax. Captain Shkrebo conceded that monsoons had grown stronger in recent years, and that

the tides and currents he encountered were not the ones indicated on the British Admiralty charts, but that was as far as he would go. And the ice pilot, Cherepanov, claimed to be especially tickled at the thought that the earth was warming and the ice was melting. "So the U.N. did a study, huh?" he kept saying of the 2007 I.P.C.C. climate report, which I had made the mistake of citing. "Well, if the U.N. says it's true, it must be true." I gave Vadim a copy of a book I had brought with me about global warming, but I don't think his English was up to it, and it lay unread on the bridge until I took it back to my cabin.

Post-Soviets tend to be skeptical about global warming. But there are notable exceptions. Earlier this year, Vladimir Putin hosted a team of scientists from the Vostok Research Station, Russia's leading research station in Antarctica. In the nineteen-eighties, researchers at Vostok were the first to extract an ice core covering a full glacial-interglacial cycle, which was crucial for confirming the hypothesis that carbon-dioxide levels and temperature are connected. So when President Putin asked Vladimir Lipenkov, from the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute of St. Petersburg, whether the scientist really believed that human-made greenhouse gases were a significant factor in global climate, Lipenkov did not back down. "No one denies that," he said.

"No, no," Putin said. "There are experts who believe that the changes in the climate are unrelated to human activity, that human activity has just a minimal, tiny effect, within the margin of error."

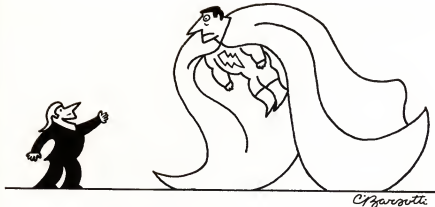
Lipenkov's answer was categorical: "It is not within the margin of error. If you look at the last five hundred thousand years, according to the data from Vostok Station, it turns out that the level of carbon dioxide and the change in temperature are correlated; that is to say, they have always moved practically together. Right now, according to atmospheric measurements, the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is significantly higher than at any time in the last five hundred thousand years."

In the East Siberian Sea, we encountered a different kind of ice from any we'd seen before. It was thicker and older, and most impressive of all, it stretched north as far as the eye could see. The ice

we'd encountered thus far was drifting along—it had become detached from the great polar ice pack—whereas the ice here was part of the pack, and it looked almost like land. It wasn't, of course, land, and in fact it wasn't even stable; all the ice in the Arctic, since it lies atop the ocean, is subject to the currents of that ocean, and is therefore always in motion. Because of the Transpolar Drift—which takes ice from the Russian side and past the Pole, where it eventually floats by Greenland and into the Atlantic—the oldest ice in the Arctic is rarely more than ten years old.

But this system has been here continuously for millions of years, developing during that time a complete ecology, from the algae that bloom underneath the ice and the copepods that thrive on its edge, to the cod that eat them, to the seals that eat the cod, to the white bears, kings of the Arctic, whose great paws have widened over time so the bears can walk on ice that would seem too thin to support their weight. And, seeing the ice that is at the center of this ecosystem, we smashed right into it.

We went slowly, at times very slowly. Looking out, you'd have thought we were in a snow field—it was white in all directions, save for the black-and-red stern of the *Yamal*. It was now clear that we would make it through the ice. We were just too big not to. Yet at some point in the East Siberian Sea I began to hope that we would lose. Here was a landscape that we were simply causing to disappear. We carried sixty-seven thousand tons of iron ore. Add to this about thirty-seven thousand tons of coking coal, some limestone, and a lot of heat and you could forge about fifty thousand tons of steel—enough steel for three ships just like the *Odyssey*. And each of those ships would beget three more ships. We would breed ships like rabbits, and I wondered why. The owner of our ship, Mads Petersen, was in daily e-mail contact with our captain, and one time he called the satellite phone on the bridge to say hello. "Mr. Mads!" Captain Shkrebo exclaimed into the phone, and eventually passed the receiver to me. Petersen asked, Was it a great adventure? Yes, I said, it was a great adventure. And the ship, I added, was a powerful ship, which needed to fear no ice. "Yeah," Petersen agreed. "It's a lot of steel." He didn't yet know



"But the cape—the cape—see how it flows."

where we were docking in China, but he was pleased that the ship was on its way.

I found it impossible to dislike Mads, who had sent us on this journey as much out of curiosity as cupidity, and who was not blithe about the circumstances. "On the one hand, yes, more shipping," he had said in Murmansk. "On the other hand—global warming." But I found now that I wanted him to fail, to be turned back, to have to address the next Arctic shipping conference he attended with a tale of woe. It was hard to see how this could happen. The only thing out here as big as us was the lonely iceberg we saw in the Laptev Sea.

On July 20th, we reached Pevek, a small, sad port city in far northeast Russia, and parted ways with the cargo ship Kapitan Danilkin and the icebreaker Yamal. With the Vaygach in the lead, we continued eastward, now much closer to the shore, which was hilly, green, and snowy. This was Chukotka, land of the Chukchi. When the Swedish professor A. E. Nordenskiöld, the first man ever to complete a passage through the Northern Sea Route, met the Chukchi people, in 1878, he found that they knew no Russian but could count to ten in English. They had more contact with the American whalers who had started coming through the Bering Strait than they did with the Russians. We were pretty far east.

I spent hours looking for polar bears. The bears were white, and the ice cover was white, so they weren't going to be

easy to see. One night, Vadim saw a walrus in the water and took a blurry photo of him. But bears do not typically hunt walrus, which are as big as bears and have huge, scary tusks. Bears prefer the smaller ringed seal. In recent years, as the ice has started melting earlier and receding faster, polar bears have been missing their chance to get on the ice for their summer hunting, and been forced inland, close to human beings, where they have a tendency to get shot.

I was beginning to count the days. I enjoyed not having to check my e-mail, but I wanted a beer and I was tired of the ship's loose-leaf tea: in the absence of a strainer, the leaves inevitably got into my mouth. Even the ice—so remarkable, so perishable—was starting to be a bit much. "O.K., we saw the ice, it was interesting" is how Vadim summed up the feeling. "But enough is enough." If it had been more difficult; if it had been more dangerous; if the passage were not already, in some ways, routine, perhaps we would have felt differently. I had lunch with Dima Yemaliyenko, the electrician, and announced to him my view that we were just twelve days from China. (This turned out to be optimistic.) Dima shrugged. "I don't count the days until there's a month left on my contract," he said. "So we get to China, so what? It's just another city. When there's a month left on my contract, then I'll start counting." Vadim, for his part, admitted that when he got home from a contract he usually went to see a shrink.

After Pevek, there were just three

hundred miles until we emerged from the ice and rendezvoused with our sister ship, the Nordic Orion, but these were the slowest miles of all. It took us two long days to cover them, and the crew entered a kind of fugue state. There would be short periods of reprieve, and then the ice would appear before us again, looking like a jetty or even a coast. One morning, I woke up at around five because it seemed to me that we had stopped. I went up to the bridge and, sure enough, we were trapped amid several large ice floes. The Vaygach had turned too sharply and we hadn't been able to follow. Vadim and the ice pilot and the captain were all on the bridge; they looked exhausted but also, somehow, relieved. One of the worst things that could happen to a seaman in the Arctic—we were, technically, beset—had just happened, but it wasn't so bad. Not far from here, in 1879, the American Jeannette expedition, which sought to reach the North Pole, became trapped in the ice. It then drifted northwest on the ice for a year and a half before finally being crushed: "It looked like a staved-in barrel," one witness said. The crew, of thirty-two men, managed to get off the ship and onto the ice, with three small boats and some provisions, and then made their way to the Siberian mainland, but one of the boats sank, while the two others became separated, and only thirteen crew members survived. This would not happen to the *Odyssey*. The Vaygach turned around to extricate us, but we kept our twenty-foot propeller going, and eventually our immense mass got the better of the ice, which slipped off to the side. I wondered what the crew of the Jeannette would have made of us.

Late in the evening on July 21st, two days from the Bering Strait, there was a radio message from the Vaygach that I didn't catch. The ice pilot was on the bridge, and he moved quickly to pick up a pair of binoculars. He said, "Bear."

At first, we couldn't see it. Then there it was: a small bear, not a cub but not fully grown, either, about the size of a very large dog, and a little more beige than I'd expected. The creature was running along the ice, occasionally falling into the little ponds that formed in it, then getting back out again and running

some more. It was at the most vulnerable age for a bear, weaned off its mother but not fully proficient at hunting. It was not yet fat.

Once in a while, it turned to face the *Odyssey* and opened its jaws wide for a roar. We couldn't hear it from where we were—especially not over the sound of our own engine—but it was definitely roaring at us. And it was running away.

At noon the next day, the *Odyssey* finally emerged from the ice. Waiting for us, on schedule, was the Nordic Orion, which was on its way to Murmansk to pick up iron ore and return with it, through the Northern Sea Route, to China. Also waiting was a Swedish oil tanker headed for Finland, and a Chinese ship, the *Xuelong*, which was on a scientific expedition into the Arctic. It would be the first Chinese trip through the Northeast Passage, and it would raise fears of Chinese encroachment on the Arctic. The vessel itself was a Ukrainian-built cargo ship.

The *Vaygach* sent a small motorboat to ferry Cherepanov, the ice pilot, aboard the Orion, and then the *Odyssey* continued on its way. Toward evening, we ran into a school of whales. They'd come up, spray water into the air, and then, with a flash of their big black tails, dive down again. It was a joy to watch. We saw probably fifty whales. American whalers had first gone through the Bering Strait and then east into these waters in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but it seems they didn't get them all.

The end of the ice and the sendoff from the whales made it feel as though we had bid farewell to the Arctic, but the Arctic had not yet bid farewell to us. Early on the morning of July 23rd, we saw what looked like land due east. This would have to be Alaska. But Alaska was more than a hundred miles away—too far to see. "It's not Alaska," Vadim said. It was a mirage. The water was still cold but the air was considerably warmer, and the result was a "superior mirage": we saw the dark line of the horizon twice, both where it actually was and at a phantom place above it. The mind interpreted the top image as land. This kind of mirage can happen anywhere but is particularly common in polar regions. The mirage was not something you could look away from, then look at again to find that it

was gone. It was in its way a physical fact, and it kept up for hours. We never did see Alaska.

Around mid-morning, we reached the easternmost edge of Russia, which is also the easternmost edge of the Eurasian landmass: Cape Dezhnev. It is a sheer rock cliff, as dramatic and definitive as Cape St. Vincent, in Portugal, the southwesternmost point of Eurasia. In 1728, Vitus Bering had come through the strait from the south, rounded this cape, and then, running into ice a few miles farther along, decided to turn back. At the time, because he didn't continue to St. Petersburg, some people didn't believe him that there was a Northeast Passage. But he was right.

And so to China. We had, it seemed, been through so much, and yet we were only halfway there, still more than thirty-five hundred miles from our destination; at our average sea speed, the remainder of our journey would take between eleven and twelve days.

We set our course southwest and turned the ship back on autopilot. Life returned to its pre-Arctic routines. When a ship is in port, it gets scratched

and scuffed in a hundred different ways. It had been too cold and wet in the Arctic to do anything about the damage, but now the crew could begin repainting the winches and windlasses, and greasing the chains that the saltwater and the air had begun to rust. A day south of the Bering Strait, the crew saw the sun set for the first time in three weeks. It didn't go very far that first night, and continued to project a dim, hazy light over the ocean, but the next night was as dark as any. The bridge crew started drawing a heavy blue curtain across the bridge to separate the illuminated section from the front, where the lookouts needed total darkness to see into the night.

The crew experienced boredom. What is boredom? Boredom is staring for hours at the smooth, mirror-like water, hoping to catch a glimpse of something, anything. Boredom is deciding to create a tea strainer from a soda can, going down to the galley, cutting a can in half, poking holes in the bottom with a knife, and then cutting one's finger, pretty badly, on the aluminum. Boredom is not just showing up exactly on time for the nightly Ping-Pong tournament but holding a clandestine practice session



"My God, look at all she's had done! Or is that someone else?"

during the afternoon. Less productively, boredom is playing Spider Solitaire on the computer in the rec room. Boredom is watching other people play Spider Solitaire in the rec room. The ship's champion was Vadim. He played on the third, most difficult level, and he won a quarter of his games. But he took no joy in it. "Motherfucker," he could be heard muttering at the computer. "Motherfucker."

As the days stretched on, people became grumpier. Discipline relaxed. Vadim may have stopped either showering or doing his laundry, because there was a slightly sour smell wafting from him. He also complained that his feet hurt. During a test of the emergency generator, Dima, the electrician, accidentally cut off all the electricity to the bridge, causing most of the instruments to shut down, and every possible alarm on the bridge to sound. There was an immense racket, matched only by the yelling of the captain at the electrician, who yelled right back.

One morning, I went up to the bridge at around six to find Vadim sitting with Able Seaman Generoso Juan watching American music videos on the chief mate's laptop. Vadim was delighted to see me. "Do you know this band?" he said. "It's called Blink 182. They play a form of music called 'punk rock.'" He proceeded to d.j. a series of songs about Odessa, including the Bee Gees' "Odessa":

"I lost a ship in the Baltic sea. I'm on an iceberg running free."

Mads Petersen still had not informed the captain of our destination in China, and the men discussed which port they'd prefer. Shanghai was the favorite—the city wasn't too far from port, and the girls were friendly—but it was unlikely we'd be going to southern China with iron ore, given that steel was mostly manufactured in the north. Maybe it wouldn't much matter where we ended up. Chinese ports are busy, and if the time in port is too short no one would get off anyway. Some of the men said they wouldn't go ashore even if there was time. It was expensive, and possibly dangerous. Ordinary Seaman Alvin Piamonte said the Mafia had taken root in China, and he wasn't going ashore unless he had two or three guys with him, which could be impossible to arrange given everyone's schedules. The ports the men most loved—the ones in Brazil, Australia, Vietnam—were friendly, warm, and relaxed. They used to like American ports, but after 2001, as part of the Global War on Terror, the United States abrogated centuries of international practice by severely restricting foreign seafarers' ability to go ashore. The men of the Odyssey always became agitated when discussing this. The only country as restrictive as the U.S., they said, was Saudi

Arabia. In the words of the second mate, "It has taken the little happiness we had, and made it less."

The only way to cheer the men at such points was to remind them of Bangkok. In Bangkok, as soon as you arrive, a boat comes alongside and disgorges a portable bar, a restaurant, and many friendly young women. If you pay in advance, a woman will move into your cabin for several days, sleep with you, and get up in the morning and iron your shirts—all for about thirty dollars a day. In some ports, the authorities turn a blind eye to this sort of thing. In Bangkok, according to Vadim, if you try to kick the party off your ship, your cargo simply won't get unloaded. For this reason, seamen love Bangkok.

In the last days of July, we passed by the disputed southern Kuril Islands, off the northern tip of Japan, and then we entered the Tsugaru Strait. After weeks of silence, the radar screen bloomed with hundreds of ships, of all different sizes, heading in all sorts of directions: container ships, the rectangular blocks stacked high on their decks like Legos; oil tankers, the pipes tangled on their decks like snakes; and small fishing boats, looking for tuna.

At last, Mads Petersen informed us of our destination: a new port in northern China called Huanghua, a hundred and forty miles southeast of Beijing. Mads said that the port's maximum draft was forty-two feet, and at first this caused consternation. "I did all the calculations," Vadim told the captain heatedly, "and even if the bilges are empty, and we've burned seven hundred tons of fuel, we're still at forty-three!"

"Stop yelling," the captain snapped.

Vadim became quiet. "Was I yelling?" he asked. The captain nodded.

But the crisis soon passed; Huanghua Port was expanding, and the authorities told us that forty-three feet would be no problem. On the other hand, a port this new could hardly be expected to have much infrastructure for entertaining seamen, or even much of a town. The men were disappointed but not surprised, and the second mate even offered the hypothesis that because the port was new the girls might be even cheaper—twenty dollars, he said. On the evening of August 4th, we arrived at an anchor spot in



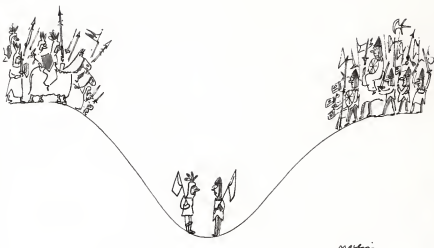
"Let's see what he does when he peers over a real cliff."

the Bo Hai Gulf, twenty-five miles from the port, and, with a tremendous noise, dropped our seven-ton steel anchor. We were three days behind schedule, which, considering the unpredictability of the route, wasn't bad.

For four days, we sat at anchor, with nothing to do. The Bo Hai Gulf is less a sea than an oil-and-gas field with some saltwater on it; not far from us, drilling platforms burned excess natural gas into the air. The only marine life that seemed to flourish in so dirty a sea was jellyfish, and we watched them float by our ship, hour after hour. By this point, we were out of flour and sugar. On the third day at anchor, we broke our last Ping-Pong ball. The crew had no maps, no friends, no guides to the city they were about to enter, and no way of getting them. All they knew was that the Chinese authorities had sent a very strict checklist of things that must not be aboard the ship when it came into port, including bugs. The ship had been entirely bug-free until entering the Bo Hai Gulf, which was in fact quite buggy. "It's *their* bugs!" the captain protested. Nonetheless, each day the crew would sweep the upper platforms, and Michael Arboleda would stalk around the corridors of the accommodation with a flyswatter, killing everything in sight.

On the morning of August 9th, we were cleared to enter the port. It was hard at first to grasp how big it was. The Bo Hai Gulf in general—and this port in particular—was shallow, and so the Chinese were dredging. By picking sand up from the bottom and moving it elsewhere, they had managed to make a canal that a ship like the *Odyssey* could travel through with room to spare. To protect the canal, they had constructed miles of breakwater. And still they were reclaiming land from the water, constructing a new pier several miles into the harbor. "*Moloditsi*," the captain said: "bravo." What seemed from a distance like the outlines of a town was in fact an array of warehouses, processing plants, and cranes. Later, I read that during the reconstruction of the port large bribes had been paid to the port company's chairman, Huang Jianhua. A court had sentenced him to death. It was an impressive port.

Two tugboats steered us to our pier



"Look, we're here. We might as well clash."

next to a row of big red cranes. Vadim gave the order to open our cargo holds, and we all looked inside: the iron ore was there just as we'd left it in Murmansk, black, heavy, unshifted, and dry. We lowered our gangway to the pier; Michael and Alvin became security guards; and then we waited. The first person to visit us was our agent in the port, a tall young man who spoke halting English with a slight British accent. The men threw themselves upon him. They had gone on and on about the girls they were going to screw, for between twenty and fifty dollars, but now all they wanted was SIM cards for their phones so they could call home and Internet cards for their computers so they could Skype. Dima came onto the deck with his laptop, to see if he could catch a free Wi-Fi signal, but there was nothing; he'd have to wait, and pay.

The surveyors were next. There were three of them, all well dressed, thin, and friendly, and wearing what looked like expensive designer eyeglasses. They didn't speak much English, but they were shepherded into the ship's office and someone went to look for Vadim.

The last few days of the trip had seemed really to wear on Vadim. In addition to his smell, he looked tired and growled more than usual at Spider Solitaire; because his feet hurt, he'd started breaking his own rule against open-toed footwear on the bridge, and wore sandals. Now, after making the

Chinese surveyors wait, he tromped into the ship's office. He wore a white jumpsuit, its top five buttons unbuttoned so that his chest and a gold chain could be seen. He looked as if he hadn't slept, shaved, or showered in weeks. He looked angry. But I had stood with him that morning as we pulled into port and he recited the various differing qualities of ports worldwide, and knew that this was the part of the trip he most enjoyed. I even wondered if he'd been preparing for this moment, like a great actor preparing for a part. The Chinese surveyors, who looked as if they all had degrees in mathematics, must have been frightened at the sight of him, and also relieved. This creature was unlikely to be able to read, much less out-math them.

Vadim then proceeded to get the better of the surveyors in at least three ways. First, after boarding a small boat and travelling around the perimeter of the ship, he bullied the youngest of them into accepting all his readings of the depth of the draft. "Thirteen twenty-three?" the surveyor would offer, and Vadim would snap, "Thirteen twenty-six! Absolutely!" I thought the surveyor would be offended by this, but he quickly grew accustomed to Vadim and laughed at everything he said. When it came time to measure the water density, Vadim dropped the hydrometer down to the very bottom, where the density would be greatest. As all this was going on, one of the younger



When the snow that rests on top of ice floes starts to melt, green pools, or "melt ponds," form. Unlike white snow cover, which reflects sunlight



back into the atmosphere, puddles absorb it, and the sunlight slowly drills a hole in the ice.

crew members was walking around with another surveyor measuring the water in the bilge tanks. The less water he measured in the tanks, the more cargo we had, and the young crew member had been instructed by Vadim in the proper technique of bilge measurement. "Was I born in Odessa, or not?" Vadim said.

After all the numbers were added up and multiplied, it turned out that he'd gone too far: we now had two hundred tons more iron ore than when we left Murmansk. Vadim slapped his forehead and explained to the surveyors that he'd suspected the water-density readings had been off in the port of origin. Would the surveyors mind just signing for the lower, original number? The surveyors didn't mind. What were a few hundred tons of iron ore when you were receiving fifty million tons every month? China was going to swallow our little shipment and demand much more.

There were a few more formalities to take care of, and in the meantime some port traders came by and offered SIM cards and other small favors. There was no question of any girls coming on board, and there would hardly be time for a shore visit. The ship had never felt more like a prison. How long would it even be in port? The cranes were very large. The cargo holds were open. In the next two months, the *Odyssey* would go back to Murmansk and then back to China, then travel across the Pacific to Vancouver to pick up a load of coal, which it would take back to Hamburg via the Arctic route. Mads Petersen would meet the ship again in Hamburg, in late November. "She looks basically the same as when I saw her last time," he would tell me. "I was actually a bit surprised that the effects were not greater." During the summer of 2012, the Arctic ice would set a record for melting, while the ships would set a record for cargo taken through the route. But that was in the future. For now, toward evening, exactly a month after we'd left Murmansk, one of the cranes swooped down from above, like an enormous red hawk, took the first pile of Russian iron ore, and deposited it on the Chinese pier. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/VIDEO

On board the *Nordic Odyssey*.

FICTION

SHIRLEY TEMPLE THREE

BY THOMAS PIERCE



Mawmaw's throwing the party, and her own son is three hours late. Already he's missed his cousin's gosh-darn ceremony and the grape-juice toasts and the cake-cutting, and now he's about to miss the couple's mad dash to the car, too. All the tables are decorated with white flowers in beakers, since the groom is a chemist for a textile company, and in the foyer she's put out enlarged photos from when the bride and groom were babies and total strangers to each other, and over all Mawmaw would give her reception an A-plus if not for this business with Tommy.

Tommy is driving in from Atlanta, where he works as the host of a popular show called "Back from Extinction." On each episode they actually bring back long-dead, forgotten creatures—sabre-toothed tigers, dodo birds, and all the rest. The show is a little controversial, but people seem to enjoy it. Tommy always looks so handsome in his khaki safari vest.

The happy couple is about to depart when the phone rings. One of the uncles holds it out the door saying it's you-know-who on the line. Mawmaw swears it away, because she doesn't want to hear it. Not a word of it. Tommy is always full of excuses. She gives all the guests baggies of rice, and they go out front and shower the bride and groom as they dive into the back of a Plymouth decorated with shaving cream and condoms, and then they're gone and the party is over, and Tommy has missed the entire thing.

What's crystal clear is that he doesn't give two hoots about anyone but himself.

House empty again, Mawmaw steps onto the back porch to smoke a menthol and feel the cool night air on her freckled skin. The night air is a natural force, and natural forces help you remember how small you are, and when you remember how small you are in the Big Picture you see how silly it is to be upset at almost anything. It's a technique she picked up from a woman on television, and even though the woman was talking specifically about money trouble, Mawmaw finds it works in most situations. The technique helps you to remember that you have to surrender control to the universe. She can feel the breeze tickle her skin. She can recognize the breeze as a natural force much larger than her lit-

tle old arthritic self. And she understands that one day—who knows, maybe even tonight in her sleep—she will die and enter God's eternal golden Kingdom and feel His Love, and when that happens all her frustrations and concerns will be like dewdrops on the windshield of a fast-moving car, the glass streaked clean and clear of all blurriness. That thought is a true comfort to her, and she's close to letting go of her anger, but then she allows herself to picture Tommy with that boyish look on his face, the one he puts on when he pretends to have absolutely no idea why anyone could possibly be mad at him.

Mawmaw stubs her menthol out on the steps and goes inside to stack the dirty dishes and glasses. The real clean can wait for the morning. Upstairs, she changes into her nightgown and takes her pill. She is on the edge of sleep when she hears the truck in the driveway.

The porch lights hum with a new electricity. If the moon could radiate more light, it would. Tommy is home. She wants to sing. She wishes the party weren't over so everyone could see her son. When she greets him out front, he pulls her into a deep hug. "You look thin," she says. "How about some coconut shrimp or wedding cake?" His eyes are bloodshot, his brown hair ruffled. He's wearing suit pants and a white undershirt. She hasn't seen him in eight months and six days. She's already forgiven him, already forgotten how mad she was an hour ago.

"I've got a good reason for being late," he says and pats the truck, which has a "Back from Extinction" magnetic decal on its door. "Something I need to show you. Pour us both a drink and meet me around back."

She pours him some grapefruit juice in a tall Daffy Duck glass. Tommy comes into the house through the back door and flips on the floodlights for the yard. She hands him the glass and he takes a swig, looks at her confused. He pulls a flask out of his pocket and tips it into Daffy Duck. In the yard he's got something hidden under a quilt. It's moving.

"What I'm about to show you," he says, "you can't tell a soul about it. If you did, it would be major trouble. Trouble with a capital 'T.'" He sips his drink and tugs the quilt away.

Mawmaw takes a step back. She's

looking at some kind of elephant. With hair.

"Don't worry. She's not dangerous," Tommy says. "Bread Island Dwarf Mammoth. The last wild one lived about ten thousand years ago. They're the smallest mammoths that ever existed. Cute, isn't she?"

The mammoth is waist high, with a pelt of dirty-blond fur that hangs in tangled draggles to the dirt. Its tusks, white and pristine, curve out and up. The forehead is high and knobby and covered in a darker fur. The trunk probes the ground for God-knows-what and then curls back into itself like a jelly roll.

"What's a goshdarn Bread Island Dwarf Whatever doing in my yard?" Mawmaw asks.

"Listen," Tommy says. "This is very special. Other than the folks at work, you're the first modern human to ever lay eyes on such a creature. Her episode hasn't even aired yet. Go on, you can touch it. She's friendly. Practically tame. Her name's Shirley Temple."

"Shirley Temple?" Mawmaw asks. "You can't name it that. Shirley Temple was Shirley Temple." She points to the dog pen, under which Shirley Temple the Great Dane is buried. The dog had tumors that couldn't be removed. The vet wanted to put her to sleep, but Mawmaw couldn't bear it. One night she left the pen open by mistake, and three days later she found the dog curled and cold under the porch.

"All right," Tommy says. "I meant it to be honorific. Call this one Shirley Temple Two, if you'd like." He puts his hand on the mammoth's tusk. "Or maybe we should call it Shirley Temple the Third? Since, you know, technically, the first one was the 'Good Ship Lollipop' Shirley Temple. This one's about as dangerous as the little girl."

He runs his hand along Shirley Temple Three's back. The mammoth looks up at him with dark, mysterious eyes. It doesn't seem to know what to do in this new setting.

"Is it full grown?"

"That's what they tell me. Isn't it amazing?"

Mawmaw nods because the mammoth really is a scientific miracle, a true marvel, but, then again, it's getting late. She's been awake since 4 A.M., working on final preparations for the reception,

and she's already taken her pill. The moonlight shines down on the three of them. They decide to keep Shirley Temple Three in the dog pen for the night.

Not all of Mawmaw's friends like her son's show—especially her friends at God's Sacred Light. When the show first debuted, she had not yet retired as the church's financial administrator, and Pastor Frank pulled her into his small, warm office and asked if she was concerned about her son. She hadn't been until that moment. Pastor Frank knows everything there is to know about Mawmaw and Tommy. They joined the church two months after she gave birth. She wasn't married, because Tommy's father was already married to someone else. Kyle Seever was a C.P.A. in another town and had given a talk in Mawmaw's night class. Kyle couldn't leave his wife, but he was a real gentleman about all of it and mailed regular checks until the day he died of a heart attack. Mawmaw thought it best not to attend the funeral.

Tommy knows the name Kyle Seever. Mawmaw doesn't like secrets.

Her son comes into the kitchen the morning after the reception and asks if he can have scrambled eggs and grits. She can't refuse him. His hair sticks up in the back. He's forty-two but could be twelve. Up on her toes, Mawmaw reaches for a pan on a high hook, then down low for a

whisk in a bottom drawer. She's feeling more energetic than she has in months. Her knees are hardly bothering her at all. Tommy sips his black coffee and reads the newspaper. The eggs crackle in the bacon grease.

"And how's Shirley this morning?" Tommy asks.

All morning she hasn't let herself look out the window above the sink.

"Don't see nothing out there," Mawmaw says.

"Don't see it?" Tommy is up in a flash and out the back door. She watches him scurry across the grass in his boxers. He goes inside the pen. The mammoth emerges from behind the oak tree in the far right corner. From a distance it's almost doglike. But that long probing trunk. Those tusks! Tommy squats in front of the mammoth and runs his fingers through the dirty-blond coat.

"Wash your hands," Mawmaw says once he's back inside. "Could have diseases."

"Maw, it doesn't have any diseases," he says. Yet she can't help but notice how thoroughly he scrubs his hands in the sink.

She puts his breakfast plate on the table and sits down to watch him eat.

"How come they let you take this elephant?" she asks. "Isn't that against the rules?"

"It's not an elephant. Listen, Maw, I'm going to let you in on a dirty little se-

cret. You know about the Back from Extinction Zoo, right?"

"It's where that cute little zookeeper takes all the animals to live at the end of every show."

"That's right. Her name is Samantha. Only, she doesn't take every animal to the zoo. We never say this on the air, but sometimes we clone twins by mistake, and that, legally speaking, is a bureaucratic nightmare. There are so many fucking laws that we—"

"No 'F,' please."

"Sorry, but it's true. You'd think we were trying to make nuclear weapons. We're allowed to keep both twins alive until we've filmed the episode, so we can use each one on camera. But then we have to get rid of one. Samantha is the person who has to euthanize them. It's awful."

Tommy scrapes the grits into a small pile and takes another bite.

"Why are you telling me this?" Mawmaw asks.

"Because," Tommy says. "We had two dwarf mammoths. Only, this time Samantha couldn't bring herself to do it. She took Shirley home instead. Not the smartest move, but it's not like she could just set a mammoth loose in the woods, you know? Anyway, the show suspected something was up. She needed it out of her house for a few days in case they came snooping around, and I told her I would help."

Mawmaw goes to the window. Shirley Temple Three is using her tusks to root up the dirt. She wonders what it eats. If it would eat eggs. Shirley Temple the dog used to eat eggs.

Tommy plans to be in town for less than a week, but his friends want to see him. One night his high-school buddy Mitch Mitchells comes over to take him out like old times. Mitch is recently divorced, and Tommy says he thinks he's lonely, which is enough to make Mawmaw laugh. What does Mitch Mitchells know about loneliness? But, standing in the foyer, Mitch gives Mawmaw a long, sad hug. She hasn't seen him in probably a decade. Unlike her son, he hasn't aged well. He has an extra chin, thinner hair. He's clearly in awe of Tommy, a real celebrity, and is full of questions. Has Tommy met many movie stars? Is he dating anybody special? Have any of the animals bitten him or stung him or stabbed him or



"The corporation was very lonely, because people thought it was different from them."

Fo Guang Shan temple, Kaohsiung

In the peaceful monastery gardens, a 36 metre-tall Buddha presides over proceedings.



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THE HEART OF ASIA



"I am not having this conversation again."

done him any sort of bodily harm as yet unimaginable? And how do the scientists bring back all those animals, anyway?

First of all, Tommy says, he hasn't met many movie stars, since he lives in Atlanta, not Hollywood. And he's not dating anyone special, certainly not anyone famous, and thus far, knock on fossil, he hasn't suffered even a single scratch from the animals, and, as for the science, well, to be perfectly honest, he doesn't have a clue how they do it. He's just the talent. He reads the cue cards. He doesn't have to handle any pipettes, let's put it that way. Mitch Mitchells thinks that's just hysterical.

"You'll feed the dog?" Tommy asks on his way out, and Mawmaw nods. On the computer it said prehistoric mammoths ate grasses, fruits, twigs, berries, and nuts. In the pantry Mawmaw has a

tub of mixed nuts. She pours some cashews and almonds and pecans into a metal bowl and takes it outside, to where the mammoth has stuck its trunk through one of the squares of the metal gate. The trunk recoils when she places the bowl in front of it. It doesn't seem very interested in the nuts.

"Take it or leave it," Mawmaw says and goes back in to slip into her faded red nightgown and swallow one of her pills. She sleeps hard until midnight, when a car in the driveway wakes her up. She's not in bed but at her desk, half her toenails painted dark red, the computer printing a ninety-page document about the dangers of lead-based paint. Her pills can have that effect sometimes. They turn her into a zombie. She goes to the window, but it's not Mitch's Bronco outside in the driveway. It's a taxicab.

Tommy shoves a wad of cash through the driver's window and stumbles toward the house. Mawmaw creeps back into her room and shuts her door. She considers taking another pill, but turns on the television instead.

An hour later, her son's show comes on. It's a rerun about the Glyptodon, a prehistoric armadillo thing with a spiky tail shaped like a mace. The Glyptodon is the size of a small car. They name him Glypto-Donny. Tommy narrates Donny's reentry into the wild. The camera follows him across a small creek and into a prairie with yellow waving grass. He doesn't do much except eat the grass. Tommy enters the scene and walks right up to the beast. Her son looks so small in comparison. He knocks on its hard shell. Donny doesn't seem to notice. The show ends with the Glyptodon in the back of a truck headed for the zoo. Samantha, a sturdy, petite woman with curly blond hair, gives Tommy a thumbs-up, and then there's the quick stream of credits.

No light outside yet, but she goes downstairs to put on the coffee and check on Shirley. All the mixed nuts are gone from the bowl. The mammoth makes a squeaking sound in the back of its throat.

They're eating dinner when Tommy's phone vibrates.

"Not at the table," she says. "Please."

But Tommy takes the call. He goes into the living room. She can hear that he's upset.

"O.K.," he says. "What is it you're proposing we do, exactly?" He paces. "Love has nothing to do with this. I think you just need to calm down and order a pizza and—"

Mawmaw goes out back for a menthol. She smokes two a day—one after breakfast, one after dinner. A self-imposed rule. It's been this way ever since she was a teen-ager. No one called her Mawmaw back then. She was Louise Baker, the dark-haired beauty who scooped ice cream at the drugstore after school.

A crow lands on the top rail of the dog pen, and then flies away. The little mammoth hardly moves. It's almost like a mannequin. Why isn't it moving? It moves. Mawmaw realizes she's been holding her breath. The mammoth shuffles to the back of the pen, on the

other side of which is a stretch of woods. Sometimes the deer emerge from those woods to eat the small green apples when they fall. Shirley Temple Three might like to see that, she thinks, and then takes a final drag of her menthol. Tommy says that the mammoth is from the late Pleistocene. It's been yanked out of its own time and lives outside God's natural laws.

God created the world in seven days, but those days weren't necessarily twenty-four-hour days. Each one of His days might have been a million years long. Human time means nothing in the realm of Heaven, where the clocks probably don't have hands but golden arms, and the arms belong to God. On which day did the mammoth get created? It wasn't on the seventh day, since that was the day of rest. Quite possibly it came into the world on the morning of the fifth and went back out again that same afternoon. Thinking of creations come and gone in such a short amount of time makes Mawmaw sad.

When she goes inside, the plates are still on the table. She finds Tommy upstairs, packing his bag. She asks if everything is O.K., and he says of course it is, then adds, "But I have to leave a little earlier than expected."

"Was it Samantha on the phone?" she asks.

He gives her a curious look, then continues collecting clothes off the armchair and floor.

"Are you dating the zookeeper from your show?" she asks.

"I don't know," he says. "Maybe. I don't know. Listen, Maw, I'm sorry, but I need to get back to Atlanta for a few days. I'll come back once things get sorted out."

"What about—" She motions out the window to the other house guest.

"Don't hate me, Maw. Please don't hate me, but Shirley has to stay here for a while. Not for too long, I promise. It's just that, well, if you want to know the truth, people are asking questions. Samantha's in some hot water. They want proof of death. Someone at the zoo must have made a call. I've got to help her sort it out. She might have broken a few laws."

She doesn't ask him how many laws are currently being broken in her own back yard.

"Whatever you do," he says, zipping up his roller suitcase, "don't tell anyone

about the mammoth. Once this business with Samantha settles down, we'll figure out what to do next. I promise."

She's been babysitting the mammoth for not quite a month when it starts losing hair. Mawmaw sits in front of the pen on a kitchen stool. The days are getting warmer, and she doesn't know what to do. Clumps of the mammoth's blond tangles are spread across the ground, and its exposed skin is red and irritated. It rattles the gate with its curvy tusks.

"I'm not going to lie to you. I'm worried," she says. "Tommy's not returning my phone calls. Don't look at me like that. I know exactly what you're thinking. Tommy's not calling? What a surprise, right? You got fleas, is that it? Or are you molting? Is this normal? You're probably not used to this weather, are you? Eighty-eight degrees today, and it's only going to get hotter. What happens then?"

Mawmaw wonders if the mammoth might be scratching itself raw along the fence, but over the next week, looking out the back window, she never catches it in the act. Mostly it just stands there in the heat, breathing heavy. But the hair continues to fall out. One patch of skin looks so rough that Mawmaw takes out her lotion and rubs some on the spot with her index finger.

"Just so you know, this is expensive lotion. I have to order it special. I use it on my face—otherwise I get dry between my eyes. Does that feel better?"

She calls Tommy and gets his voice mail. When the temperature hits ninety, she brings Shirley inside the house to cool off for a little while. Guiding the animal down the hallway is a challenge. The mammoth comes up only to her waist, but it is a hefty creature, much too heavy to lift or shove. Mawmaw steers it toward the laundry room, where the dryer is tumbling a load. She moves some cleaning supplies and boxes onto the shelves along the back wall, clearing a space. She spreads a plastic tarp across the floor and cranks up the air-conditioning. She fills the mammoth's bowl with beans and orange peels and mixed nuts—always nuts—and a little hay that she picked up at the garden-supply store. With some old bath towels she creates a nest beside the washing machine. She tells Shirley good night and closes the door.

By the time she climbs into bed that

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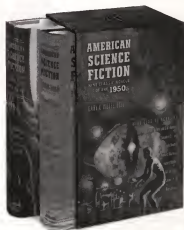
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night, the house is nearly an Arctic tundra, and she needs four blankets to keep warm. In the morning she puts on a sweatshirt and a jacket. The laundry room smells like the circus. She shovels the dung into buckets and dumps the buckets in the woods behind her house. She burns citrus candles to mask the scent.

Tommy still hasn't returned her phone calls by the time Shirley has her big television debut on "Back from Extinction." It's been on the calendar for weeks, and Mawmaw lets the mammoth come into the living room as a special treat. She offers Shirley a small bowl of milk and sinks into the couch just as the episode begins.

Mawmaw knows the theme song by heart, the horns and jungle drums that float above a highly scientific electronic beat. Tommy narrates a few basic facts about woolly mammoths. How they haven't walked the earth for thousands of years, how in some cases they were overhunted by early man. The show is very protective of the technology that gestates the mammoth, and so it skips ahead to post-birth with a montage of Shirley's first year, as her legs and trunk elongate, as her coat thickens, as her tusks sprout outward. Then Tommy enters the action. He asks one of the scientists what mammoths used to eat, and the scientist, a limp smile on his face, informs Tommy that frozen mammoths have been discovered with bellies full of leaves and grasses. They also like fried eggs and grapefruit rings, Mawmaw adds, not to mention M&M's.

"Look at you, Shirl. You see yourself? Pretty impressive."

In the next scene, Shirley is loaded into a truck and dropped off in the middle of the Canadian Arctic, in an area that approximates conditions on the Bread Islands thousands of years ago. In the back of the truck, with a fur-lined hood pulled tight around his pinkish face, Tommy explains that Shirley has been wired with cameras and a tracking device and that now, for the first time in thousands of years, we're going to get a glimpse of a mammoth in the wild. Mawmaw knows that Shirley will survive, but still she grips her armrest.

The mammoth loses interest and wanders into the kitchen.

"You're missing it," Mawmaw calls. She can hear its tusks knocking against the walls as it migrates to the back of the house.

Shirley stops losing hair. Gray scabs form a light crust over the bald patches, which break apart under a wet washcloth. But Mawmaw is still concerned about her patient. Shirley isn't drinking enough water. She seems lethargic. She comes down with diarrhea. Mawmaw discovers it, the dark-green puddles across the tarp. She leads Shirley back to the dog pen so that she can clean up the mess. She tosses the whole sheet of plastic in the trash and lays out a new one.

"What can I do for you?" Mawmaw asks, leading Shirley back inside. "Would Pepto help? More sunlight?"

The next morning Mawmaw wakes up to find even more diarrhea. The mammoth is trying to hide behind the washing machine, her tusks tapping the metal side.

Mawmaw gets on the computer and searches for "elephant + flu," but the sites aren't especially helpful. She dips her fingers in the water bowl and presses them to the mammoth's wrinkled gray lips beneath the trunk.

"Come on. You can do this. Just a little. You need this."

She dips her fingers again and this time the mouth opens a little to receive them, but when the water drops pass Shirley's lips she shuts her mouth tight again, as if the liquid were toxic. Mawmaw strokes her tusks and knobby forehead, brushing loose strands away from her dark eyes.

She calls Tommy's cell, but gets his voice mail again.

"Tommy. Shirley Temple is dying. I just thought you should know. I'm doing the best I can, but I don't think it's going to be enough. Maybe Samantha should have put her down like they asked her to. Maybe something really is wrong with her. I don't know why you brought this goshdarn thing to my house."

Mawmaw imagines finding the mammoth dead, its blond hair stiff with dried excrement, its eyes white and milky. She won't be able to lift it. She'll have to carve the mammoth into chunks to get it out-

side again. She imagines the jagged saw blades, the mess.

This is all Tommy's fault. What kind of a fool son did she raise up? This mammoth doesn't belong here, or anywhere. "Back from Extinction" is a cruel television program. The cruellest. Shirley is a clone, and that means ten thousand years ago her exact copy walked the earth. The original Shirley had parents, and maybe even children. The original Shirley probably died in some kind of ice pond or avalanche or tar pit. What if ten thousand years from now scientists made a Mawmaw clone? What would the world be like then?

Then a terrible thought: What if today is still God's seventh day and He still hasn't woken up yet from His rest? That would explain why He's been so quiet lately. What if, when He wakes up on the eighth morning, He decides He doesn't like what we've been up to down here? Maybe He'll be grumpy with us and stamp out all the lights again, return the world to darkness. In ten thousand years, the earth could be cold and barren, an endless frozen wasteland more suitable for mammoths than for humans. If they—whoever they are—do grow a new Mawmaw out of a petri dish, she can only hope that someone will set her up in a nice warm room. And if that Mawmaw gets sick she can only hope that they'll do what's right and call a doctor.

She finds one in the yellow pages. His name is Dr. Mark Sing. She promises to double his fee for a house call, and he comes over that evening. His hair is dark and shiny. He has a leather bag that she hopes is full of instruments and medicines. He takes off his tan blazer, then puts it on again. The house is still cold. Mawmaw's electricity bills have been astronomical. "You have to swear to me that you won't tell a soul what you see here," she says, and he shrugs like he's heard this all before.

"I'm serious," she says and across a blank sheet of paper writes, "I won't tell a soul." "Sign this. I want to have it in writing."

The man looks tired. He removes his glasses and rubs his left eye with the palm of his hand, the gold watch on his wrist tight. He signs the paper, and she leads him down the hall and opens the door. The mammoth is nested in the bath towels. Mawmaw has done her best to clean the room. Vanilla candles burn on the washer. The plastic tarp crinkles under



their feet. Dr. Sing opens his mouth but doesn't say a word. He kneels down by the mammoth, runs his hand through the hair, caresses its knobby forehead. Shirley doesn't seem to mind, and Mawmaw considers this a good sign.

"Can I ask you where it came from?" he says. "How long you've had it?"

"I'm sorry, but no. She going to be all right?"

He opens his bag and removes an electronic thermometer. He taps it a few times against his palm, as if uncertain whether he should proceed. Finally he lifts the mammoth's small hairy tail and inserts it quickly. Shirley's head jerks around and the tusk collides with the doctor's left shoulder, almost knocking him over. The thermometer beeps. He looks at the reading. Mawmaw asks if it's high, and he says he's not sure exactly, because he doesn't know what's normal. He says what he really needs is a blood sample, to run some tests, but Mawmaw can't permit that. He gets up off the floor and goes into the hall. On the wall he sees a framed picture of Tommy in his khaki duds.

"He's the one from that show."

Mawmaw doesn't answer.

"Could be a mammoth flu, for all I know," he says. "She definitely seems dehydrated. I suppose I could give her fluids intravenously."

Mawmaw agrees that he should, and that's the plan. Fortunately, Shirley doesn't protest when he inserts the needle. Mawmaw pays Dr. Sing triple his usual fee and shows him the piece of paper again. "Who would believe me anyway?" he says and takes the check.

The next morning the mammoth has its appetite back. Mawmaw cooks it rice and yogurt. She lets it out into the yard and runs a stiff wire brush through its matted blond coat. The mammoth seems to like being brushed. Then it wanders to the edge of the property to root around. Mawmaw pulls the excess hair out of the brush, stretching and curling the strands between her fingers.

"I could make a Shirley sweater. I bet it'd be warm."

Mawmaw is in her bed when she hears the first wail. She's taken a pill, but she's wide awake now. Maybe the fever and the dehydration were only early symptoms of some deeper crisis. The mammoth lets out a long guttural cry that

almost shakes the house. Mawmaw waits for another, but it doesn't come. She might have dreamed it. She's on the verge of sleep when it erupts again, that slow mournful bellow. Pulling the top blanket over her shoulders, she sticks her veiny feet into her Goofy slippers and flips on every light switch on her way downstairs. In the laundry room, Shirley is staring at the floral-print wallpaper, as close to the wall as her tusks will allow.

"What's going on in here?"

The mammoth doesn't move.

"You need to drink more water. That's all it is. You've got some kind of flu. You need sleep."

Mawmaw has an extra pill in her pocket. She takes it into the kitchen and coats it in a gob of peanut butter. The peanut butter sticks to the food bucket. The mammoth's trunk grabs the gob and tucks it into its gray mouth.

"Whatever's bothering you, we can talk about it in the morning."

She gets back in bed and nestles under the weight of the blankets. A few minutes later, the mammoth repeats the sound, but this time, instead of trailing off into nothingness, it ends with several shrill, trumpetlike staccato bursts. Mawmaw considers turning on her television but doesn't. She's worried. Maybe it's mating season. If so, how tragic. Shirley is separated from her closest mate by ten thousand years. Then comes another wail. The mammoth lets up only at the first hint of sunlight.

The mammoth's night terrors have been happening for a week when Tommy finally calls. She can hear street noise behind him. He says he's so sorry she's had to deal with Shirley these past few months, but if the mammoth dies of its sickness, maybe it's for the best. For everyone. He says the network still hasn't figured out that Samantha took the mammoth, but they've been keeping an eye on her. That's why he hasn't been able to bring Shirley back to Atlanta. "I was actually beginning to worry I might have to come down there and euthanize her myself," he says.

"And how would you do that?"

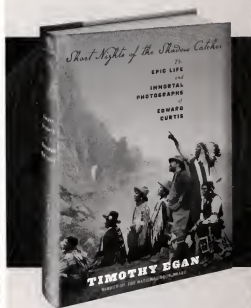
"God, I don't know. A shovel, I guess. Or maybe I could poison it. Thankfully, I don't think it's going to come to that. Right?"

Mawmaw doesn't mention Dr. Sing. She doesn't mention the wailing. She

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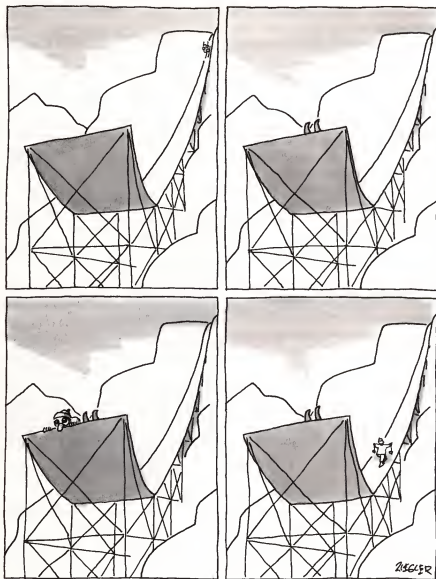
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doesn't tell him that Shirley's problem might not be physical but spiritual. She lets him think she wants it dead, too.

Calling Pastor Frank is a risk, but Mawmaw is desperate. Three years ago Pastor Frank prayed over the body of a young girl with brain cancer, and despite the doctors' dire prognosis the girl survived for another two years.

He arrives five minutes early and, without being asked, removes his large black sneakers at the door. He pulls her into a deep hug and pats her back. In the living room, she offers him coffee.

"No, thank you," he says. "I get jumpy."

He's examining the room: the oil portrait of baby Tommy on the wall, the antique tea cart with the porcelain tea-

cups, her mother's old electric organ with the thin black pump pedals. Possibly he's wondering how Mawmaw could afford such a nice living room with what had been a modest church salary.

"My son bought me this house after I retired," she says. "A total surprise, believe me. I didn't ask for it."

"It's lovely," he says. "You look exhausted. Everything O.K.?"

"My dog is dying. I haven't been sleeping well."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Never easy. I still get teary-eyed thinking about our Pomeranian that died two years ago. Copperhead bit him."

"Did you pray for him?"

"For the dog? Well, it happened so

fast. He was dead within hours. Do you have any tea? Noncaffeinated?"

"Of course," she says, and goes into the kitchen. As the water heats, and then as the tea bag steeps in the Mickey Mouse mug, she imagines what happens next, the moment of first contact. She tries to picture Pastor Frank, the tarp crinkling under his knees as he places his warm hands over Shirley's tangled hair. She imagines his words as a light, almost liquid, that forms an amberlike shell around the mammoth's body.

She takes the tea into the living room. Pastor Frank is leaning over the electric organ, tapping the keys. He hasn't turned it on, so it produces no sound. She offers him the tea.

"You know, my wife and I don't have cable," he continues, "but we've been hearing an awful lot about your son's show recently. Is it true they brought a Neanderthal back from the dead? Two ways of thinking about these things." The pastor's thin brown hair is brushed back with pomade. He has one finger on a low B-flat and another on a high one. "Two scenarios. In scenario one, God killed off the Neanderthals because He wanted it that way and therefore we're going against His will by bringing one back. In scenario two, there never was such a creature as a Neanderthal, and the so-called fossils were put there by the Devil himself. The second scenario is frightening, of course, because that would mean we're breathing life into the Devil's creations."

Mawmaw can feel the pulse in her temple. "They never brought back any caveman," she tells him. "Only animals."

"Still," he says, as if that settles it.

They sit down in the wingback chairs, facing each other. Mawmaw isn't sure whether or not to proceed with her plan. After a long silence, he asks her if she'd like to pray for her son.

Pastor Frank reaches out for her hands. How many times over the past thirty years has she put her hands in his and said the words? How many times has he shined the light into the shadows of her heart? He knows all there is to know: about every sordid encounter she ever had with Tommy's father; about her visit to the clinic and what she almost did there, the blue gown and paper-thin slippers, so thin they barely existed at all; about every dark dream, every dark

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thought; her doubts about God, about Hell, about what happens next.

Pastor Frank is praying for her son. He's asking God to bring Tommy home again, to protect him from evil forces at work in the world, to reveal to Tommy the path back to God. His words hover in the space above her head, a wispy cloud in a night sky, breaking and reforming in the high atmospheric breeze. From below, her feet planted firmly on the ground, Mawmaw could reach out for those clouds if she wanted, poke her fingers through them, but she doesn't. She recycles Pastor Frank's words, borrows their power. She recites a silent prayer of her own, this one focussed on the creature in the next room, their two prayers, she hopes, working in tandem.

"Can you add my dog?" she interrupts.

"Of course," he says. "Do you want to bring her out?"

"She's at the vet."

Pastor Frank smiles and gives her hands another squeeze. He speaks softly, almost in a whisper. He asks God to keep watch over sweet little—what's the dog's name?—to watch over sweet little Shirley Temple. "Lord," he says, "we praise all the beauty in your creation, the fish and the birds and the turtles and the squirrels and the cats and the dogs and even the possums."

The wailing does not stop. A neighbor calls to complain about the noise, and Mawmaw blames the television, her bad hearing. She tries a night-light in the laundry room. She tries stuffing towels under all the doors to muffle the sound. She prints out pictures of the tundra and other mammoths and tapes them to the walls. Some nights, half asleep, Mawmaw worries that the noise is emanating from within the catacombs of her own body. Opening her mouth she half expects the cries to amplify. She is able to sleep only in spurts. She dreams that Shirley is her guide through a world of snow and ice and unidentifiable landscapes. Every direction looks the same, but Shirley knows the way. Where they are going is important, but in the morning Mawmaw can no longer remember why.

One night, she gives the mammoth three pills. The next night, four. But, no matter the dosage, they don't seem to have any effect.

"What is it?" she asks, downstairs

LOVE AND MEMORY

How we made love in the memorial forest for the Shoah dead and we remembered only ourselves from the night before! The forest did the remembering for us and gave us leave to love. You remember how we threw off our clothes in the madness of desire: the outer garments flew like heavy birds to the branches of the trees, and the underwear remained on the forest floor clinging to the springy briars of the thorny burnet, like snakeskins. And our shoes stood nearby, mouths open in psalms of praise.

—Yehuda Amichai

(Translated, from the Hebrew, by Bernard Horn.)

again, desperate, the lights flipped on. "What do you need from me? Is this mating season? I'm sorry to tell you this, but you got no one to mate with. You're on your own. You got to hush up. I've tried everything I know to try. I'm going out of my mind." She steps backward into the hall, the door to Shirley's room still open. "Is this what you want? You want out? Here." She opens the door to the back yard. "Do whatever you need to do."

Bands of gold and yellow sunlight move slowly across the floor at her feet. She's quite certain no morning has ever gleamed in this particular way. She feels like she's been asleep for a thousand years.

Mawmaw slides into her bathrobe and slippers. Only once she's on the stairs does she remember leaving all the doors open for Shirley. The mammoth isn't in the laundry room—or anywhere else in the house.

"Come on out, wherever you are. Don't play tricks on me."

She steps outside into the sunlight and peeks under the edge of the porch, just in case. The far corner is where the dog went to be alone in the end. But the mammoth is not there. Nor is it anywhere in the yard or the dog pen. Shirley has escaped.

Of course, there's no one to call for help but Tommy. His voice mail picks up after a few rings.

"Call me back," she says. "It's about Shirley."

As soon as she hangs up, she regrets the message. What would she even tell him? That she lost the mammoth? That it's quite possibly wandering the neighborhood? She climbs into her car and

drives up and down the block, too afraid to actually yell out Shirley's name. On Payton Street she spots a hulking shape beside a brick house, but when she gets closer the shape is only some yellow pampas grass. Two streets later, a white-haired man in a blue tracksuit is walking his Jack Russell terrier. The sight of the man with his dog, the parallel rhythm of their strides, almost brings a tear to Mawmaw's eye. She drives home again and flips on the television in her bedroom. She waits for Shirley to show up on the local morning news, then the afternoon news, then the evening news.

She goes outside to smoke a menthol, but can't remember which end is which. The ash flakes on the brick at her feet. She pictures Shirley in the oncoming beams of interstate traffic. She pictures her in a hunter's crosshairs, then her head stuffed and mounted.

She is on her fourth menthol when she hears a car in the driveway. A few minutes later, Tommy comes around the corner of the house, his face gaunt under the porch light. He looks out to the dog pen and seems relieved not to see a mammoth there. If Shirley knows what's good for her, Mawmaw thinks, she won't come anywhere near the house tonight, not with Tommy here.

"I was knocking out front," he says, his hand up to shield his eyes from the light. "Guess I should have called first."

Mawmaw takes another drag of her menthol.

"What's the matter?" he says. "It's me." ♦

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Thomas Pierce on "Shirley Temple Three."



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THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

DEAD RECKONING

"Zero Dark Thirty" and "This Is Forty."

BY DAVID DENBY

In "Zero Dark Thirty," the masterly new movie directed by Kathryn Bigelow and written by Mark Boal, a C.I.A. field agent has an Al Qaeda operative in his grip. The agent, whose name is Dan (Jason Clarke), a tall, handsome guy with a bushy brown beard, subjects the prisoner to "enhanced interrogation"—a full complement of pain, naked humiliation, and waterboarding. "This is what defeat looks like," Dan tells the operative, who is named Ammar (and is played with sympathy by the French actor Reda Kateb). These words are spoken at a C.I.A. "black site," in Pakistan, in 2003. But most of the movie is about American defeat—the failure to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, as Al Qaeda pulls off attacks in Saudi Arabia, Britain, and Pakistan. "Zero Dark Thirty" chronicles a long trail of frustration, leading to fragmentary gains and, at last, to success, on the night of May 1, 2011: Operation Neptune's Spear, a Navy SEALs siege of bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad, which is so perfectly executed that it almost defies normal skepticism about the way life works. The virtue of "Zero Dark Thirty," however, is that it pays close attention to the way life does work; it combines ruthlessness and humanity in a manner that is paradoxical and disconcerting yet satisfying as art. Ammar may be working for Al Qaeda, but he's also a human being, and he's suffering. Yet, in attempting to show, in a mainstream movie, the reprehensibility of torture, and what was done in our name, the filmmakers seem to have conflated

events, and in this they have generated a sore controversy: the chairs of two Senate committees have said that the information used to find bin Laden was not uncovered through waterboarding. Do such scenes hurt the movie? Not as art; they are expertly done, without flinching from the horror of the acts and without exploitation. But they damage the movie as an alleged authentic account. Bigelow and Boal—the team behind "The Hurt Locker"—want to claim the authority of fact and the freedom of fiction at the same time, and the contradiction mars an ambitious project.

The movie begins at the primal moment: the screen is black as we hear the frightened voices of people trapped in the World Trade Center on 9/11. That misery and abjection is what the hunt is all about. The C.I.A. unit charged with finding bin Laden isn't just trying to prevent further attacks; it's openly seeking revenge. Boal, who began his career as a reporter for *Playboy* and *Rolling Stone*, interviewed some of the principals involved. What we see—the anger and the desperation; the terse, anxious exchanges among agents; the breathless chase through crowded Pakistani streets—is stunningly detailed and convincing from scene to scene. It also moves with juggernaut speed. Even the pauses, the silences, the instances of reflection push the narrative along. In this movie, thinking is action.

There is someone else at that interrogation session: an observer, who wears a black hood and removes it to shake out a glori-

ous curtain of reddish-gold hair. This is Maya (Jessica Chastain), who becomes the key C.I.A. investigator into bin Laden's whereabouts. Maya, based on a real agent, whom Bigelow and Boal have elevated out of agency anonymity, is an obsessed woman, with no personal life or interests. But Bigelow chose an appealing actress to play her: Chastain has a slightly distraught look, a sudden smile, a warm-spirited responsiveness. Maya winces at American cruelties and grieves over the death of colleagues in failed operations. Unlike Claire Dances's troubled, bipolar Carrie, in the TV series "Homeland," Maya is as sane as daylight but, nevertheless, single-minded about killing bin Laden. Dan, exhausted by his duties, returns to Washington, but Maya stays in the field, along with the Islamabad station chief (Kyle Chandler), who's a Bush Administration functionary; an ambitious operative (Jennifer Ehle); and a surveillance specialist (the impressively sombre Édgar Ramírez).

Maya's theory is that bin Laden can't communicate with his network by cell phone or Internet, so he must be relying on a courier. The movie turns into the ultimate procedural, in which computer work, matching photographs, and one seeming irrelevancy after another in an old interrogation video lead Maya to a man known as Abu Ahmed, who, at regular intervals, drives a white S.U.V. from Peshawar to a house in Abbottabad. Maya's investigation has been going on for years, but, as shaped by Bigelow and Boal, the hunt feels like one continuous surge of energy, colored by anguish and fury. At first, no one takes Maya seriously. But her demands on the agency's resources become increasingly insistent, culminating in an enraged moment in which—as Chastain's neck, engorged, swells mightily—she threatens the C.I.A. station head with exposure for incompetence if he doesn't give her what she needs. That a woman is leading the charge is almost as surprising to the Americans as it is to the Muslim prisoners. After all the female avengers of the past fifteen years—Uma Thurman and Angelina Jolie kicking men in the ego and other places—American movies have at last produced a woman clothed, like Athena, in willful strength and intellectual armor.

"Zero Dark Thirty" is a puzzle that keeps changing and re-forming; we're held by fleeting references, by the work-

ABOVE: GRAEFU



Kathryn Bigelow's movie chronicles a long trail of frustration, leading to fragmentary gains and, at last, to success in Abbottabad.

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ings of Maya's calculations. Bigelow and the cinematographer, Greig Fraser, make fluid but firm use of a handheld camera, without excessive agitation, so that you feel pitched into the middle of things but also see clearly what you need to see. A sequence in which a Jordanian who may provide access to bin Laden approaches an American military installation is drawn out to a level of almost unendurable suspense. Two unexpected bomb explosions throw you back in your seat; they have a ferocious power that makes most movie explosions feel like a mere perturbation of digits.

The raid begins with beautiful shots of Black Hawk helicopters taking off at night, silhouetted against a few brilliant lights. The journey across the mountains from the base in Afghanistan to western Pakistan is conducted in darkness and quiet, like a sacred ritual. The SEALs are older and beefier than you expect—big men in their late thirties who nonetheless move smoothly, as if their legs were on finely calibrated springs. Bigelow and Fraser shot the sequence twice, accumulating forty hours of footage that was edited down to twenty-five minutes of sepulchral, green-tinted action—what you see through night-vision goggles. The raid is a methodical, room-by-room exercise in deadly aggression that is without parallel as a display of force in recent movies. Bigelow presents bin Laden's corpse and Maya's emotions after the kill with considerable circumspection. An example of radical realism, this movie has its mysteries as well as its devastating certainties.

"I was forty, and then I blinked, and there I was, gonna be ninety," an old woman says to Debbie (Leslie Mann), who is herself just turning forty. Such is the murmuring subtext of "This Is 40," Judd Apatow's very funny new comedy: Debbie and her husband, Pete (Paul Rudd), a Los Angeles couple with two daughters, are hitting early middle age, and Apatow has arranged their discontents (with themselves, with each other, with their parents) into a generous and vibrant series of confrontations and fights, all garnished with wisecracks of startling pungency. Debbie and Pete are both exercise freaks, but she's a secret smoker, and he's a not-so-secret cupcake eater, and each indulgence is treated as a

taste of mortality. In Los Angeles, time has a particular poignancy, since the body can never be young enough to satisfy an unsustainable ideal. Debbie owns a boutique, and she wonders at the firmness of the breasts of a young employee—a salesgirl played by Megan Fox, no less—even squeezing them to make sure that they're real. They are. Then Fox says, "By the time I'm forty, these are going to go *National Geographic* on me."

We're back in Apatow country, familiar from "Knocked Up" and "Funny People." (Debbie and Pete are the other couple from "Knocked Up," and Leslie Mann, who was in both movies, is married to Apatow.) There is the bourgeois household, with its chaise longue in the bathroom, its iPads, its BMW and its Lexus, its sunshine always outside the window. Here is all the plenitude and warmth and the triviality and sadness of Los Angeles life. In this case, the gleeful abundance is suffering some temporary troubles: Pete is an independent record producer devoted to an aging—and low-selling—rock musician, Graham Parker (who appears as himself), while, at Debbie's boutique, someone is stealing money from the till. At home, Debbie and Pete are running out of both cash and libido, and have begun tearing each other apart. Mann's happy-face buoyancy fades, in an instant, into resentment and malice—the switch to a mean tongue is her favorite comic device. Paul Rudd has a handsome jaw and a great smile. Pete, at forty, is still a boy—moody, selfish, and dishonest. Rudd has been playing one version or another of this character for years, and he has some of his giddiest moments ever as Pete drives his daughters to school while belting out songs that his wife hates and eating forbidden cheeseburgers. For Apatow, one guesses, the only things that can forestall death are comedy (the movie is full of superb comics, including Albert Brooks and Melissa McCarthy) and the flourishing of his children, Maude and Iris, who appear in the movie as Debbie and Pete's daughters, performing with all the sweetness and anger that any children might feel around their parents, coupled, in this case, with near-professional aplomb. ♦

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David Denby and Dexter Filkins discuss "Zero Dark Thirty."

THE PALE KING

Michael Jackson's ambiguous legacy.

BY BILL WYMAN



"White folks, some young white folks, they run away from America," Joe Brown, the father of James Brown, once said. "Black folks, they run all over, up North, everywhere, tryin' to get into America." These days, waist-deep in the defiant hip-hop era, it's easy to forget the nineteen-fifties, when black artists, held back, in various ways, from the new pop America, looked on as white performers appropriated their music and took it to the masses. In 1956, Pat Boone's anodyne version of "Tutti Frutti" was in stores and on the radio at the same time as Little Richard's lubricious original, and ended up outcharting it. Artists in niche markets always dream of "crossing over" and making

it big in the mainstream. During the next few decades, numerous artists left the grittiness and, in many ways, the truth of their culture behind, as crossover ambition intoxicated and, some have argued, overwhelmed black music. (The critic Nelson George has described the process as a "cultural suicide.") For better or for worse, Michael Jackson, whose 1982 album "Thriller" remains the best-selling record in history, fulfilled this ambition more spectacularly than any black performer before or since.

American in the best sense, "Thriller" contains multitudes, from rock ("Beat It") and pop ("P.Y.T.") to soulful schmaltz ("The Girl Is Mine") and easy

listening ("Human Nature"). At the album's center is Jackson's greatest song, "Billie Jean." Its protagonist has been accused of fathering a son with a young woman; his denials ("The kid is not my son!") are undercut both by the facts ("His eyes were like mine") and by that relentless bass line tiptoeing around the morally compromised speaker. (The song is loaded with portents. What then seemed to be paranoia would, in time, take on a different cast, when Jackson was accused of another kind of sexual indiscretion. And, later, Jackson would maintain that he had fathered two kids who didn't look like him at all.) But Jackson is also engaging in an early bit of mythmaking. "I am the one," he sings, "who will dance on the floor in the round." Gasping out the words of the second line in triplets—"who will dance on the floor in the round"—he was reminding his audience of who he was: a young star whose whole life had been lived on a stage, in the round.

Jackson started on the outside. He was born into a working-class family in Gary, Indiana, in 1958. His mother, Katherine, a Jehovah's Witness, was the emotional center of the household, but her passivity in the face of her husband's violence toward their children seems to have marked Jackson as decisively as the violence itself. Joseph Jackson, whose rhythm-and-blues band, the Falcons, disbanded in the early years of his marriage, is not the first father to have channelled his thwarted creative aspirations into his children, but he had more success than most. We tend to think of success stories like the Jacksons' as a kind of movie montage—giddy scenes of rehearsals, driving to shows, playing before bigger and bigger crowds. But Joseph, who had grown up in Arkansas, was also trying to get into America, and for him the trip was grim and determined; the reality was an angry father driving five boys into unknown and potentially dangerous territory. (The Jackson 5 played everywhere, from supermarkets to strip clubs.) Order was maintained with a regimen of beatings and whippings, and, later, at their motels, Michael saw his father disappearing with new female acquaintances, and pretended to sleep when his older brothers brought groupies back to the rooms they shared. Family members, specifically his father, would tease him

Jackson became the world's biggest black star by shedding conventional images of blackness.

about his acne and call him Big Nose.

By the time the Jackson 5 landed an audition for Motown Records, in 1968, the label had perfected the art of crossover. Berry Gordy, a onetime boxer and auto worker, who founded the label in 1959, understood what black performers needed to leave behind in order to get ahead in mid-century America. His label's charm school molded and dressed the artists, and kept their images clean. In the classic Motown simulacrum, the women were super-club elegant—the exemplar being Diana Ross. The men were emotional—sometimes titanicly so, like Levi Stubbs, of the Four Tops—but they were slickly outfitted in suits, and never threatening. Gordy tended to shy away from politics as well; no Motown act played at Woodstock or Monterey, and it's hard to think of a song about Rosa Parks or lynchings. Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye shrugged off these rules later in their careers, but the label's social timidity set the tone for black pop for years after.

Gordy knew what he was doing: Motown sold probably more than a billion records. The Jackson 5 was his last great signing of the classic era. The group's first four singles—"I Want You Back," "ABC," "The Love You Save," and "Til Be There"—went to No. 1. Jackson's ineffable presence—this tiny man was able to lecture a female on the vicissitudes of love one minute and tell her "Show us what you can do!" the next—fascinated audiences. The Jackson Brothers learned the business, occasionally the hard way. The contract their father signed with Gordy gave them a fraction over one per cent of what their records earned. Michael also learned how to stick to the company script. A writer for the magazine *Soul* marvelled at the way "an eight-year-old boy... became a man when a microphone was in his hand." In fact, the singer was ten at the time. Motown had deemed little Michael not little enough, and promptly shaved two years off his age. Jackson, a quick study, showed no qualms about repeating his new age to journalists.

He was less receptive to another industry lesson: that pop stardom has a short half-life. The Jackson 5's novelty wore off, and Motown's interest waned. In 1975, the act moved to CBS (later Sony), leaving behind both brother Jermaine—who'd married Gordy's daughter—and their name, another casualty of

the contract that Joseph had signed. The royalty rate was better than Motown's, but the Jacksons, as the new ensemble was called, managed little more than a few disco-lite hits. In any case, Michael had bigger plans, and, despite his family's resistance, he put together a solo deal with the label. It was the key transitional moment in his life.

That any aspect of his career has been neglected seems hard to believe, and yet Jackson may be the most underappreciated pop songwriter of his era. "Off the Wall," his debut as an adult solo artist, was recorded with Quincy Jones, a man of exquisite taste and impeccable hepcat pedigree as a producer, arranger, and composer. Jackson needed a hit single to establish himself as a mature star. As Jones was collecting material from other songsmiths, Jackson wrote the hit for himself. "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," a seamless piece of dance pop, is neither imitative nor straightforward. It sports a distinctive plucked guitar riff and a restless bass line, to which Jackson added a new, androgynous falsetto. Jones didn't create the hit for him. The home demo that Jackson prepared shows that his conception of the song was close to the finished product; he even invited his younger siblings Randy and Janet to bang on bottles to accent the driving percussion track. "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough" was a No. 1 hit, and "Off the Wall" went multiplatinum. This was 1979, the year of Jackson's first nose job.

The success of "Off the Wall" left Jackson unsatisfied. His next album, he determined, would have to be bigger. For the "Thriller" sessions, Jackson sketched out a moody R. & B. number, with crisp, emphatic drums and an irresistible chorus. As with "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," the home demo of "Billie Jean" is a strikingly accurate template of the final version. The song dazzled just about everyone who heard it, in the winter of 1983; it went to No. 1, and stayed there for seven weeks. This was another example of Jackson's prowess as a high-stakes clutch hit writer. (Jackson, by my count, has solo writing credit on nine No. 1 songs.) Shortly after, during his seismic performance of "Billie Jean" at the "Motown 25" TV special, he introduced his moonwalk dance step to the world. The song's video became one of the first by a

black artist to be played regularly on the newly launched MTV. "Thriller" spawned seven Top Ten hit singles and remained No. 1 on the *Billboard* album chart for thirty-seven weeks.

Jackson wasn't content with popularity alone, though. As the royalties rolled in, he and his attorney, John Branca, won a hard-fought campaign to buy the music-publishing catalogue that included the Lennon-McCartney songs recorded by the Beatles; Jackson paid forty-seven and a half million dollars. In the nineteen-nineties, he merged his company with Sony, and the new operation, rechristened Sony/ATV, grew steadily in value over the years and was recently estimated to be worth more than a billion dollars. Fabled blues and soul artists, former Motown colleagues, his glowering father: all must have looked on in awe. Jackson had achieved a popular success, and a measure of economic autonomy, that previous black artists could never have dreamed of. The crossover was complete. He had made it into America.

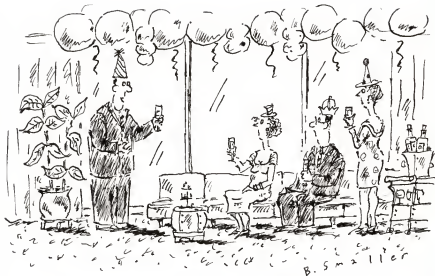
One of the cruelties of stardom is that you never know when you've reached your apogee. For Jackson, decline set in almost as soon as "Thriller" fell out of the No. 1 spot, in April, 1984. It lasted a quarter of a century, which is to say, the rest of his life. Randall Sullivan, a former *Rolling Stone* contributing editor best known for "Labyrinth," an investigation into the police corruption surrounding the murders of the rap stars Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur, does his best to capture the complexities of a sad tale. His new, nearly eight-hundred-page biography, "Untouchable: The Strange Life and Tragic Death of Michael Jackson" (Grove), is chaotically organized and overlong. But it details thoroughly both the bad decisions that led Jackson to ruin and the increasingly foggy world from which he made them.

By the mid-eighties, Jackson had become the biggest black star ever, in part by shedding conventional images of blackness. It is true that he continued to work with black musicians and never explicitly repudiated his musical heritage. The racial overtones in the long-form video for the single "Thriller," for example, are unavoidable; made up as a ghoul, Jackson seems to be tacitly ridiculing stereotypes of menacing black behavior, in what proves, in the

end, to be an entirely wholesome entertainment. In 1986, however, when Jackson learned that he had vitiligo, a skin condition that produces blotches on the body, his response was to bleach his skin and pancake his face with white makeup. His infantile voice, androgynous manner, ever-whitening skin, and de-Africanized features and hair became a grotesque literalization of the crossover aesthetic.

But little about Jackson is that simple. He may also have been erasing from his body the face of the father who beat him. That some childhood trauma was driving a destructive urge to alter his appearance through plastic surgery seems likely. By the first decade of this century, Jackson's cheeks had a skeletal hollowness and his jawline was suddenly square; his mouth had been outlined with a permanent lipstick-like tattoo and he had lemurine black liner around his eyes; the broad African nose on the cover of "Off the Wall" had become a dainty protrusion. Sullivan unearths a pathetic cultural tic-in: the minuscule ski jump of a nose that Jackson so determinedly sought was that of a child actor, Bobby Driscoll, best known for dying young, but only after lending his voice and his face to Disney for Peter Pan in the classic animated movie. He wore a prosthetic during the last years of his life. At that point, according to Sullivan, all he had was "a pair of nostrils surrounded by a rim of shrivelled, shrunken, discolored cartilage."

Still, Jackson had accomplished what he'd set out to do—not just conquer the world but, in a sense, merge with it. In the late eighties and early nineties, however, with the rise of hip-hop, the crossover era was fading. The most high-profile of the new rap artists—N.W.A., Public Enemy, Snoop Dogg—refused to play to the perceived tastes of a mainstream audience. Instead, they were proudly black, highly sexualized, violent (in some cases sociopathically so), and, all in all, decidedly ungratifying to whites—who nonetheless bought their records by the bushel. Public Enemy's Chuck D. went so far as to attack the most sacred of all white rock stars (and, not incidentally, the paragon of white appropriation of black music): "Elvis was a hero to most / but he never meant shit to me." Jackson brought in rappers for cameos on his later records, but the results were decidedly non-



"Here's to even lower expectations in the New Year."

street. He tried it on the lead single from "Dangerous" (1991). "It don't matter if you're black or white," he insists in the chorus. That wasn't how the hip-hop world saw things; Jackson was suddenly off-message.

His experiments in sexual liminality were more troubling. In the summer of 1993, Sullivan recounts, Jackson was on tour in Asia, promoting "Dangerous," when the news broke that the parents of a thirteen-year-old boy, Jordan Chandler, had accused the singer of sexually molesting their son. In retrospect, the allegations seem inevitable. Jackson had been busing underprivileged and sick children out to his Neverland ranch, in Santa Barbara County, California, which doubled as an amusement park, to play and, in some cases, spend the night. Jackson always maintained that these sleepovers, during which he openly shared his bed with young boys, were entirely innocent. "If I am guilty of anything," he said, in the persecuted, messianic tone that began creeping into his public utterances at the time, "it is of giving all that I have to give to help children all over the world; it is of loving children of all ages and races; it is of gaining sheer joy from seeing children with their innocent and smiling faces; it is of enjoying through them the childhood that I missed myself." Jackson ended up settling out of court with the Chandler family for more than twenty million dollars.

The question of Jackson's sexuality remains fraught. Clearly, his abusive upbringing didn't help. As a child star, he sang about worldly things, but without carnality. Despite glimmers of maturity during his solo career—few can look at the cover of "Off the Wall" and not see genuine erotic appeal—he seemed to regress to a pre-sexual moment. His moves and his mien became first feline, then feminine. (This transformation didn't go unnoticed in the black community; Louis Farrakhan called Jackson "sissified.") In the eighties and early nineties, Jackson tried to play the P.R. game and make his personal life seem conventional, embarking on high-profile "dates" with Madonna and Brooke Shields, but at a certain point, whether he was tired of the act or felt that his celebrity allowed him to do as he wished, he seemed to recuse himself from grown-up romantic life and become a sois-disant savior of children.

In 1994, when the child-molestation furor was at its height, Jackson married Elvis Presley's daughter, Lisa Marie. Sullivan's book does little to challenge the general impression that this was anything other than a ploy on Jackson's part to distract the public from his P.R. implosion. Presley apparently came to feel the same way, but not before she got to sit by as Jackson told Diane Sawyer in a television interview that he believed that there was nothing wrong with shar-

ing a bed with children. Several months later, Presley filed for divorce.

In 1996, Jackson got married again, to a woman named Debbie Rowe, a nurse who worked for one of his plastic surgeons. The pair met cute—Rowe had tenderly cared for the star after Jackson spilled a harsh skin-bleaching agent on his scrotum—and soon began having children, though not in the conventional sense. Prince was born in 1997, Paris a year later; both are white, and neither bears much resemblance to either parent. A third child, Blanket, arrived in 2002. Jackson claimed to be his father through artificial insemination, but he never revealed who the mother is. It's an open question whether Jackson ever had sex with anyone—man, woman, or child. Sullivan believes the singer died a virgin. When he and Rowe divorced, in 1999, Jackson was given full custody of the children.

By this time, Jackson was falling deep into debt. Ever since he bought the Beatles' catalogue, in the mid-eighties, the singer had acquired a reputation as a savvy businessman. The evidence here lays this idea to rest. Sullivan's book is, among other things, a record of staggering financial profligacy and wrongheadedness. We read, for example, of a trip Jackson made to Paris, in 1996, to meet a Saudi prince with whom he unveiled

plans for a "family values" global entertainment empire whose projects included plans to create a theme park home for all British bovines afflicted with mad cow disease." Before long, Jackson is touching down in Warsaw, "where he announced the \$500 million World of Childhood amusement park he planned to build with the cooperation of the Polish government." In the nineties, he worked with business advisers to market a new sports cola called, simply, Mystery Drink.

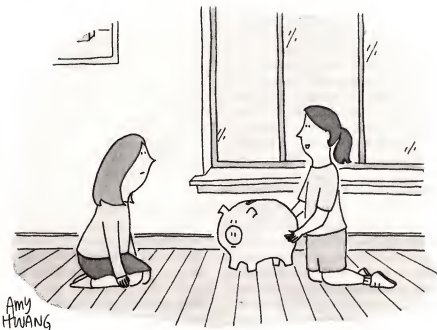
Meanwhile, Jackson lived, and spent, like a deranged royal. At Neverland, general upkeep—"from carpenters to snake handlers," as Sullivan puts it—cost four million dollars a year. Jackson spent twice that on travel and antiques. One of his many financial advisers was shocked to discover that, in December, 2000, Jackson had continued to rent an entire floor of the Four Seasons in New York, where he'd been staying with his entourage, during a monthlong trip back to Neverland for the holidays. Asked why he didn't vacate the rooms and save himself several hundred thousand dollars, Jackson replied, "What were we supposed to do with our stuff?" He went through advisers, collaborators, and managers cavalierly, from a producer of gay porn to a fat Bahraini sheik, from a Florida billionaire to one of Marion Barry's former press secretaries, with an assort-

ment of record-industry weasels and various other frauds floating in and out of his life as well. Finally, the Nation of Islam shows up. "This was a huge mistake," one of Jackson's associates said. "It was worse than Sony," said another.

None of this financial distress was necessary; all Jackson had to do was go to work. Whether paralyzed by the grandiosity of his visions or simply incapacitated by the prescription drugs to which he'd become addicted, the singer played only two tours, about a hundred and fifty shows, in the last two decades of his life. The money he left on the table during this period—the Age of the Supertour—was immense. The Rolling Stones grossed nearly a billion dollars from just two tours in the two-thousands.

He did find time to open his home to the British journalist Martin Bashir. The result, an odd, transfixing TV documentary, "Living with Michael Jackson," which aired in 2003, ranks with the Sex Pistols' decision to make the focus of its first U.S. tour a swing through the Deep South as the most unhelpful marketing decision in the history of popular music. Besides evading the question of his children's race and insisting that he'd had only a couple of plastic surgeries, Jackson again said that there was nothing wrong with his habit of sharing his bed with children. He even paraded some of them before the camera. The Santa Barbara County district attorney, who had not forgotten the settlement in the 1993 molestation case, got behind a new family with allegations who would commit to testifying against the singer. Jackson was put on trial for various charges relating to sexual activities with minors and, after a fourteen-week circus, acquitted on all counts.

Jackson deserves to have that exoneration noted. Still, his behavior with children went far beyond the bounds of propriety, if "propriety" is the word for what was violated when the thirtysomething singer routinely shared a bedroom with the twelve-year-old Chandler boy. Jackson obviously drew in the families with his seductive and glamorous world, and pushed the limits once he did. Sullivan's snapshot of the Chandler family close to twenty years after the settlement—Jackson fans have been hounding the son for years, and the father



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committed suicide in 2009—is the book's bleakest point, which is saying something.

After the trial, Jackson left Neverland for good. Chased by demons, he travelled the world with his children and a dwindling entourage, spending money compulsively. Once in a while, he managed to damage his image further, as when he was discovered, in a head scarf, using a women's rest room in Dubai. He wound up in Las Vegas, with one final whimsy in mind—the purchase of a sprawling estate whose price was far outside his ability to pay. One of his last managers—a Lebanese-American fixer named Dr. Tohme Tohme—finally convinced the star of the obvious: that his financial problems would at least be stabilized if he would just partake of the vast riches to be had from performing live. It was this advice that set in motion preparations for the comeback-and-farewell extravaganza tour, “This Is It.” Jackson was to play fifty concerts at the new O2 Arena in London, beginning in the summer of 2009. The shows sold out immediately.

Perhaps the greatest, most persistent source of torment in Jackson's life was his family. From the start of his child solo career, there was resentment at home; once the Jacksons realized that they had a golden goose in their midst, they resorted to all manner of emotional blackmail to leverage Michael's disproportionate commercial appeal for their own benefit. Exacting pressure on Michael was made easier by the fact that, even after “Thriller” topped the charts, the biggest pop star on the planet continued to live at home, in the family's Encino mansion. Sullivan makes it clear that Jackson couldn't say no to his mother, and the rest of the family systematically exploited this weakness. After “Off the Wall,” Jackson was persuaded to forgo a solo tour in favor of one with his brothers; similar arm-twisting came to bear following the release of “Thriller.” His family, over Jackson's objections, brought in the boxing promoter Don King to run the affair. The result, the so-called Victory Tour, was a mismanaged mess and a P.R. disaster. After that, Jackson largely cut himself off from everyone in his family save his mother. This made for ugly public scenes in which relatives would arrive wherever Jackson

was staying, demanding of the security that they be let through the gates, while the star refused to see them.

Predictably, the family dysfunction continued after Jackson's death. In 2003, the singer had dispensed with John Branca's services, seemingly for good, and told all who would listen how much he distrusted the attorney. Shortly before his death, on the eve of the London shows, however, Jackson supposedly met with Branca again, and after Jackson's death Branca produced a will in which he was designated a co-executor of the estate. The will was petulant. Jackson left forty per cent of his estate to his mother, and forty per cent to his kids in a separate trust, with the rest going to unnamed charities. Everyone else got stiffed. His mother was given guardianship of the three children.

According to Sullivan, Branca seems to have kept the will from Jackson's subsequent lawyers; that and other irregularities have driven Katherine and various family members to distraction, and they have challenged Branca on several fronts. But the Jacksons have always run their affairs poorly—most of Michael's brothers eventually declared bankruptcy, as did his parents—and often act at cross-purposes. The chances of the remaining Jacksons interfering with Branca's stewardship of the estate are slim. (Branca refused to answer questions about his handling of the will on the record, but it seems fairly obvious that he, or someone in his office, is one of Sullivan's chief confidential sources.) Tellingly, Jackson gave his executors “absolute discretion” in distributing Katherine Jackson's portion to her—mostly, it seems, to prevent his mother from channelling the money to the rest of the family. Sullivan's portrait of Jackson's octogenarian mother being forced to beg a music-industry attorney for funds from her dead son's estate is poignant—but it's also payback for her challenges to a will that is quite clear about Jackson's intentions. Only from the grave was he finally able to say no to his mother.

“No man achieves immortality through public acclaim,” said Bob Dylan, who had the opportunity to consider such things up close. From the point of view of celebrity and popular-

ity—the point of view that truly mattered to him—Jackson may well have been the most successful entertainer ever. His life and career remain sensational to all of us who marvelled as the black music that has run as a counterpoint to the past century—through gospel, jazz, the blues, soul, and hip-hop—resolved itself to play, for a time, perfectly in tune with a nation. Still, there's little doubt that Jackson lost something self-defining along the way. He ended up a shade, and, besides the music, all that he really left behind—an ambiguous legacy, and a tarnished name, to some rich white kids—was just the final, meaningless step in the ultimate crossover.

After a rehearsal for the “This Is It” shows in downtown L.A. on the night of June 24, 2009, the singer came home to a rented mansion. Soon the entire operation would pack up and head for London; there, Jackson knew, he would have to stand on a stage again and decisively show his children—and the world—that he could still live up to his legend. Drained from the rehearsal, Jackson probably took a shower; when he got out, he looked in the mirror at a face that had no nose, at a pinched mouth permanently outlined in pink, at the thin remnants of what was once a thick Afro. He went to bed but couldn't sleep. The night was not easy; he was awake until the morning, badgering his personal hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar-a-month physician to direct ever-increasing I.V. flows of hypnotic drugs into his system. The one that killed him—a hospital-grade potion called propofol—was used to put to sleep a man who apparently couldn't find sleep otherwise, and it's easy to see why he would need help, his mind full of songs, ideas, melodies, dance moves; of his fantasies and his lies; of the memories of his silly, grasping, toxic family; of the kids who were, or were not, his kids; of the other families whose lives he had touched and made better and the ones he'd beguiled and corrupted; of the giant global scream of an audience that he could no longer face. Sometime before noon the next morning, he drifted off to sleep and then out of existence, remembering a time when he and we were happy, when his only demon was an imaginary girl named Billie Jean, and he danced on the floor in the round. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Silent House, by Orhan Pamuk, translated from the Turkish by Robert Finn (Knopf). Set against the backdrop of a bustling seaside resort town, Pamuk's second novel, published in 1983 and never before translated into English, centers on the summer leading up to Turkey's military coup of 1980. The grandchildren of an overbearing widow arrive for a visit that will send the lives of them all into free fall. Past and present interweave as this brooding narrative glides between the various occupants of the "silent house": a beautiful woman with leftist leanings; an under-achieving history professor with a drinking problem; a young, impressionable nationalist; and a lonely dwarf who is the widow's caregiver and the illegitimate son of her late husband. Over them all, the sense of impending violence looms. Describing Turkish politics, a character says, "No matter where you go, it grabs you by the collar." The same can be said of this superb novel, which grips the reader and refuses to let go.

Flight Behavior, by Barbara Kingsolver (Harper). In the mountains of southern Appalachia, a restless young mother en route to begin an affair turns back after seeing an unexpected lake of "orange blaze." The trees in the mountains are glowing—not with fire but with a population of monarch butterflies that have mysteriously alighted on a sleepy Tennessee town. To the awe of its religious-minded residents, the "uneearthly beauty" signals the divine. To a team of entomologists, the mass migration signifies something much more disturbing about the state of the earth. Kingsolver sensitively captures the plight of the rural poor, a population endangered both by diminishing resources and by self-enforced isolation. Kingsolver is a former scientist and, at times, the novel lurches toward the scientific sermon. But her keen grasp of delicate ecosystems—both social and natural—keeps the story convincing and compelling.



A History of Opera, by Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (Norton). Opera, defined here as "a type of theatre in which most or all of the characters sing most or all of the time," spans roughly four hundred years—from its beginnings, as a form of Italian pastoral drama, in the fifteenth century, all the way to contemporary works such as those of John Adams. The authors of this history wonder how opera transcends its significant dramatic flaws—the absurdity of a tubercular character singing an aria, for instance—and why new works have "dried to a trickle." Though the book's answers to such questions are often less than satisfying, the account of opera's evolution and of the great composers who shaped it brims with insight, and polemic. The authors lament that a modern repertory dominated by "certain kinds of now-ancient opera" has created an atmosphere hostile to the cultivation and reception of new works.

John Keats, by Nicholas Roe (Yale). Keats was both inspired and tormented by his admiration for Shakespeare, who, he wrote, "left nothing to say about nothing or any thing." A similar anxiety might haunt any biographer tackling so studied a figure as Keats, and at times Roe's assertions—that Keats was an opium addict; that, had he lived, he might have forsaken poetry for prose; that his father's death, an apparent accident, was suspicious—feel unsubstantiated or beside the point. Still, this absorbing, diligently researched biography draws us into the North London homes of Keats's circle, imagining even the warmth of the fireplace as the poets challenged each other to sonnet-writing competitions. A longtime Keats scholar and chair of the Keats Foundation, Roe writes with clear feeling about the poet's tragically short life, rendering an especially poignant portrait of Keats, at thirteen, reading "as if pacing himself to go the distance."

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SMALL WONDERS

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



As televisions got cheaper, audiences grew and admen became powerful, and networks stopped taking risks. Over the

decades, comedy remained a release valve for radical sensibilities, but its conventions congealed: there's a formula to "Saturday Night Live," and network talk shows are even more aggressively conventional. Whenever Letterman hints that he'll retire, I roll my eyes. They'll just pick another white guy. Perhaps it'll be a Conan-like ironist, or someone boyish, like Jimmy Fallon, but it will be a distinction without a difference. Luckily, it's become easier each year to escape that world, by fleeing to a constellation of smaller channels and to the Internet, where idiosyncrasy reigns. In *Vanity Fair's* recent comedy issue, Chris Rock waxed nostalgic for the era when a successful comic had

W. Kamau Bell isn't doing anything structurally fresh on his new talk show, "Totally Biased," which airs on the cable network FX. Yet the show feels faintly revolutionary, just because the man is black—ridiculous but true, given the whiteness of late-night TV. A handsome, affable fellow, with a deep chuckle and a shaggy fro, Bell came up in the San Francisco alternative-comedy scene. He has no desk, but he does a monologue (which, like many late-night monologues, is hit or miss), and a likably spontaneous man-on-the-street segment. In one episode, after Hurricane Sandy, he visits a gas-station line, where a driver tells Bell that the police are helping to move his car. "When a black man gets pushed by the cops, that's a good day," Bell says. "Yeah, well, it depends on how you being pushed," the man replies.

Bell isn't the first black male comedy host: Arsenio Hall had his own show, too, beginning in 1989. But, while Hall's show was a phenomenon, it had a manic, anxious sizzle, partly because he strained to reach the largest possible audience. (Later, as ratings sank, Hall threw caution to the wind and interviewed Louis Farrakhan for an hour.) Bell's show works because, in the hip precincts of FX, he can simply take black culture as the show's default, the way network shows presume white culture. "There are actually more black 'Seinfeld' fans than there are black Kwanzaa fans," Bell argued, in one bit. "I only know like a handful of people who do it, and two of them are white lesbians with black kids." To use a gag-worthy phrase, Bell's gimmick is intersectional progressivism: he treats racial, gay, and women's issues as inseparable. That may not sound hilarious, but when it works it grants him new routes into old topics. In one guest bit, he and the black lesbian comic Wanda Sykes bonded over having white wives. Like Fallon, Bell has a nice-guy vibe, which lends his show the air of a laid-back, welcoming party: when he mistook a sexually ambiguous Comic-Con attendee

for a woman, the label "Replay of Shame" appeared over a slo-mo clip—but, refreshingly, the joke was on him, not on the interviewee.

Bell was in good form throughout the election, and, after Obama won, the show turned relaxed and triumphant. The black comic Hannibal Buress did a routine in which he put up a series of post-election tweets on the screen. The final one read, "What's faster than a nigger that just stole a TV? Obama with the United States of America." Buress gazed wearily out at the audience, then paused. "Sometimes, if it's a racist joke, I get it," he said. "But that one, I'm just like . . . yo, that was weird. Just a weird joke. And it's bad—bad structure, and I don't get it." Then some advice: "Shouldn't have tweeted that. Should have put that in the drafts, man. Step up your racist tweet game. We're watching you."

On other cable networks, particularly IFC, Comedy Central, and the Cartoon Network, a wild array of comedy series are taking similar advantage of their niche status. On the Cartoon Network, there's the stoner-ready late-night lineup Adult Swim, which includes smart animated series like "The Venture Bros.," as well as "Childrens Hospital," an anarchic live ensemble series that parodies "Grey's Anatomy"-style medical dramas. There's also "The Eric Andre Show," which is, like "Totally Biased," a talk show with a black nerd host (his co-host is Buress), but with a rawer, more aggressive vibe—Andre's version of the man-on-the-street segment involved him touching the hands of strangers, then murmuring, "It's touch-a-stranger's-hand day."

In fact, when you turn from network to cable, TV overflows with black male comedy, much of it slyly political: there's also Adult Swim's animated version of the black-power comic strip "The Boondocks" and Comedy Central's skit show "Key & Peele," which had a bit about a self-aware bully that is one of the best things I've seen all year. IFC has "Comedy Bang! Bang!" and the ultra-white "Portlandia," whose aperture is so narrow that its audience consists of people who laugh at jokes about Evites and feminist-bookstore owners (guilty!). Such shows, at their worst, can turn twee or solipsistic, but a smaller audience means more tolerance for risk, not to

mention the chance for a strange thing to stay alive. Contrast FX's cheaply made sitcom "Louie" with NBC's brilliant "Community," which crumpled under the pressure to speak to everyone.

You have to head online to find the true Wild West, where pioneers have cobbled together quasi-organized Deadwood-like comedy encampments, shooting off viral videos like pistols, and scratching together a subsistence economy using Kickstarter and PayPal. The best sketches from "Portlandia" and "Key & Peele" are passed virally, friend to friend; Web sites like Funny or Die and College Humor operate as loosely run studios, producing material that viewers vote up and down. Stand-ups saturate Twitter, devising new comedy forms within a hundred and forty characters.

Amid such chaos, the Onion is a grizzled old prospector, having staked its virtual territory back in 1996. A fake media empire, the Onion specializes in deadpan satires like "Planned Parenthood Opens \$8 Billion Abortionplex"; occasionally, these articles become accidental hoaxes, accepted by news sources as the real thing.

In 2007, the organization launched a video offshoot, the Onion News Network, which now appears on IFC as well as online, applying the same satirical tools to cable news but rendering them, amazingly, even more nihilistic. While other comics do fake news (Stephen Colbert is the form's undisputed champion), the Onion's gift is never to break character or seek applause. In one segment, a reporter seduces the wife of a missing soldier, even as he conducts interviews with her and her children. "Emma is entering adolescence at a time when having a father figure can be crucial," the voice-over intones, as the reporter brushes the girl's hair. The video ends with an eerie shot through the depressed woman's window, as she succumbs to his embrace. On a TV skit show, that premise would get defanged with some goofy twist, but there's a cruel control to ONN, whose theme seems to be that the objective reporting voice is itself fundamentally insane; not for nothing is its slogan "News Without Mercy." Once again, I close this video with nary a quiver of fear in my voice about the uncertainty of the human

condition," one broadcast concludes. "That's professionalism."

Of course, to produce cult humor you have to get someone to pay for it—ideally, your cult. Last year, when Louis C.K. put his stage show online, he charged five dollars a download, and ended up grossing more than \$1.1 million. A few weeks ago, Maria Bamford, another alternative comedian, took a similar plunge, but, unlike Louis, who fills stadiums, Bamford is a comic's comic, with a stylized, experimental act that lingers in the mind, full of riffs on her struggles with anxiety and depression. In 2007, Bamford produced a Web series called "The Maria Bamford Show"; its premise was that she had moved home to Minnesota after a nervous breakdown, and that the show was being filmed in her family's living room. (In the past few years, Bamford has been hospitalized for mental illness.) It was a cold blast of brilliance, capturing in miniature the existential loneliness of someone who feared she'd never be able to live in the world of "normal" people, and filled with half-affectionate, half-disparaging imitations of her family and friends.

Bamford's newest show, "The Special Special Special," which is available for download on Chill.com, is a more polished product, but equally radical—as unsettling as anything Andy Kaufman ever did. As Bamford performs at a mike in the living room, the camera keeps cutting to the supportive laughter of the only people who are in the audience: her parents, seated on the couch (the ultimate in narrowcasting). Bamford is tiny and blond, and speaks in a voice that is squeaky and hyper-feminine, but then she'll suddenly shriek a word, or drop into the low tones of a stoner guy, or stretch her mouth into a grotesque, rubbery gape. In one extended riff, she performs a series of damning imitations, based on what would happen if people treated physical illness as dismissively as they do mental disorders. "You'd think you'd be able to stop vomiting for me and the kids," she says weepily. In a bland female voice, she whispers, "Apparently. Steve. *Has cancer.*" Then a pause, her chin drops, and she glares with furious incredulity. "It's like, fuck off! We *all* have cancer. Right?" Her parents laugh in appreciation, but it's a routine that is unlikely to win every viewer over. Fortunately, it doesn't have to. ♦

IN THE ROUGH

Rihanna's strange kind of fame.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES



If you want a physical copy of the R. & B. star Rihanna's seventh album, "Unapologetic," which entered the charts three weeks ago, at No. 1, you can buy a deluxe version. The case folds out into three panels of photos that depict her smoking, and it houses a bonus DVD of a short film made in 2011, as she was ending a tour in London, playing shows while doing photo shoots and taking meetings with Armani. But who needs a bonus with Rihanna? Everything that the twenty-four-year-old Barbadian singer does already comes with something extra: enormous numbers, awkward questions, unconfirmed stories, unclaimed responsibilities. Rihanna has sold more

digital copies of her work than any other artist, including the Beatles. Her current No. 1 single, "Diamonds," is her tenth. But all her accomplishments are sometimes overshadowed by one incident and one relationship.

In February, 2009, on the eve of a scheduled performance at the Grammys, Rihanna became entangled in an argument with her boyfriend, the pop singer Chris Brown. Brown choked Rihanna and beat her about the face. The photographs and the police report were sickening. Violence against women in the music world had often been ignored; now it had become public, concrete, and criminal. The notoriety of this case does not diminish the

long line of abusive men (and songs) in pop history. But now, in the Internet age, the music world had been presented with a domestic-violence case unfolding in real time. How would a powerful woman react to being assaulted so publicly? Her new album title, "Unapologetic," is the strange, three-year-long summary of her reaction; it makes clear that her persona is increasingly more interesting than her music.

Her first response to the assault was months of silence, followed, in November of that year, by an introspective and considered interview with Diane Sawyer, on "20/20." There seemed to be no doubt that Rihanna was shaken by her hideous treatment and was concerned about other victims of domestic violence. Then things got weird. Through her Twitter account (which now has twenty-seven million followers), Rihanna made it clear that she and Brown were not estranged. Brown appears on the new album, in a convincingly tender duet called "Nobody's Business," which might be plausibly categorized as art rather than as a statement. Less vague was a tweet from December 8th of this year, in which Rihanna appears in bed, enfolded by a tattooed arm that looks like Chris Brown's. The text: "Damn. . . I miss my nigga."

Brown is an agile dancer, a better-than-average rapper, and a passable singer. He is also, by all appearances, a vile human being. In March, 2011, after being questioned about Rihanna, on "Good Morning America," he broke a window and stormed out of the studio. Only a few weeks ago, Brown got into a profane and inane shouting match on Twitter with the comedy writer Jenny Johnson. He deleted his Twitter account, and then, unfortunately, reinstated it.

With all this drama, it is difficult to think of Rihanna simply as a pop singer, and to honor her as a person with agency. Rihanna's stated version of independence, of being a "Good Girl Gone Bad," as the title of her biggest-selling album would have it, is being the object of badness, being subjugated. In one tweet, she wrote, "Beautiful is great, submissive is even better." What makes this attitude even

Rihanna has another No. 1 hit, but it's difficult to think of her simply as a singer.

more disturbing is that it seems to have served only to make Rihanna more popular.

So what about the music? It's very hard to find a consistent Rihanna in any of her music. She has been, wisely, a carpet-bagger from the beginning, scoring her first mainstream hit with "S.O.S.," a tune that draws from Soft Cell's version of "Tainted Love," thumping along at 4/4. Though branded as R. & B., the song took advantage of the fact that R. & B. has merged with, and been taken over by, club music. Club music centers on a 4/4 lobe that's easy to sell around the world, to audiences only mildly interested in pop. Rihanna's similarly mild interest in her own music is now an asset.

There are moments of musical satisfaction on "Unapologetic," such as the transformed reggae lilt of "Numb" and the dubstep bass of "Phresh Out the Runway." The songwriters and the producers are not amateurs. But Rihanna's voice isn't big or particularly compelling, and it works mostly by sounding relaxed and drooping, with a hint of a West Indian accent, a descending twang that sounds a bit like moaning. Her voice has a distancing effect, and it conveys not emotion but, rather, a position of powerful detachment.

This remoteness is manifest in her very public body, which is as attractive as the gig demands. She handles it, whether in fatigues or beaded bikinis, as if it held a dull sexual power, as if she could have anyone she wanted but has forgotten why she might want to. She has an exceptional physical beauty married to an unexceptional, almost disengaged sense of perfor-

mance—she may be the most successful amateur ever.

There's so much Auto-Tune applied to her voice that it's hard to say how she does or doesn't sing. Live shows find her interjecting more than singing, as if she were simply signing off on her own songs, while surrounded by backup singers and dancers. It is singing as branding, providing proof that you have encountered an approved item of Rihanna merchandise.

What Rihanna has done to remain a pop star is to choose very well-written songs. A song like "Umbrella" could have been a No. 1 for someone else. (It was originally offered to Britney Spears, and a demo on YouTube, sung by its co-writer, The-Dream, sounds just as good as Rihanna's version.) Songs like "Pon De Replay" and "Rude Boy" have used some of Rihanna's West Indian lilt, but she's not heavily invested in that singing style. Her current hit, "Diamonds," is sung in an almost completely blank style, and it shows how she manages to appeal to people while not appearing fully present. It's one of her weakest hits, a sort of hedged blend of club thump and romantic triumphalism. The verses are serviceable, but the chorus is a nightmare of confusion. Its main line could be "We're beautiful like diamonds in the sky," or it could be the background echo "Shine bright like a diamond." Either way, they both repeat too often, and never achieve any specific narrative or payoff.

The video for the hit doesn't necessarily help to elucidate Rihanna. While the song's lyrics are vaguely positive, especially for a woman who revels in celebrating dangerous love, the video—aside from an ineptly conceived opening image,

in which Rihanna rolls and smokes a blunt full of diamonds—relies on dark, non-specific danger. Chased barefoot down a street by a car at night, Rihanna is caught in the headlights and strips off her jacket. She floats on her back in the ocean; a rose burns, as does a flaming man walking through what looks like a riot. It's a collection of free-floating burners, and Rihanna looks fine with it all.

Rihanna seems to handle her career with the nihilism of a good old-fashioned rock star. Hand her a hit song, and she'll do her best to put up a No. 1. Hand her something else, and she won't push it too hard. On "Saturday Night Live," a few weeks ago, Rihanna and her band performed "Diamonds" in front of a green screen, which allowed a strange assemblage of digital imagery to swirl behind her. She moved, in Timberland boots and a fatigue jacket, as if she had perhaps heard the song a few times before. There was one bit that reminded me of dancing.

Follow her insouciance and you begin to understand her impatience in interviews when she is asked about Brown. The cover of "Unapologetic" shows Rihanna's naked torso, with words written all over the artwork, in another kind of branding: "Roc Nation" (her label), "#nasty" (her fans), "censored" (take your pick), and so on. She looks vaguely miserable and poorly rested.

Though it leaves a sour taste, appreciating Rihanna's work may demand that we accept the idea that her disregard of herself is a source of freedom, or of power. (Only she knows.) If her listeners are willing to do that, apologies may not be necessary. ♦

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Joseph Farris, must be received by Sunday, December 30th. The finalists in the December 10th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 14th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Well, I have to go—my ride is here."
Luam Melake, New York City



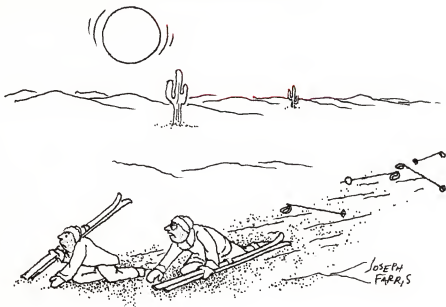
THE FINALISTS

"I am from Doctors Without Offices."
David Kempler, Plainview, N.Y.

"Now I'm getting a signal."
Heather Rose Dominic, New York City

"Bad news: you've got four blocks to live."
Ed Geis, Portland, Ore.

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